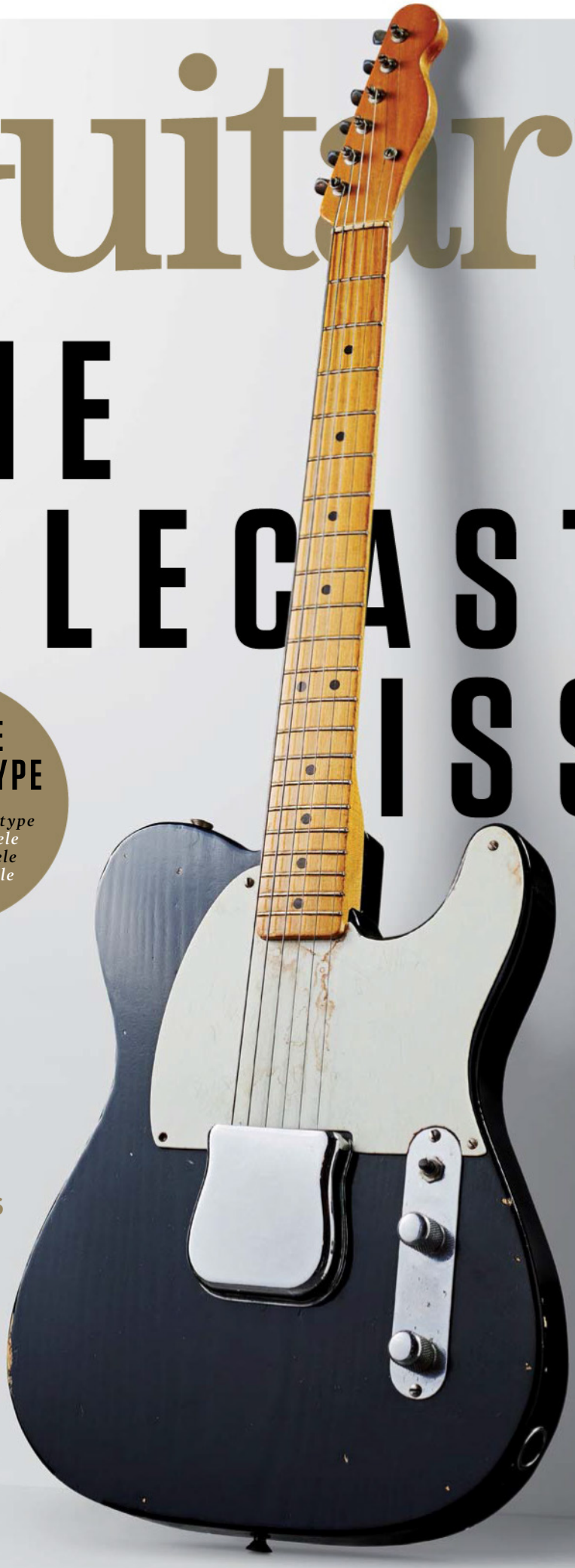
Guitarist

Issue 494

FEBRUARY 2023

THE TELECASTER ISSUE



1949 'LAMP SWITCH' ESQUIRE PROTOTYPE
The very model that featured in Fender's 1950 brochure

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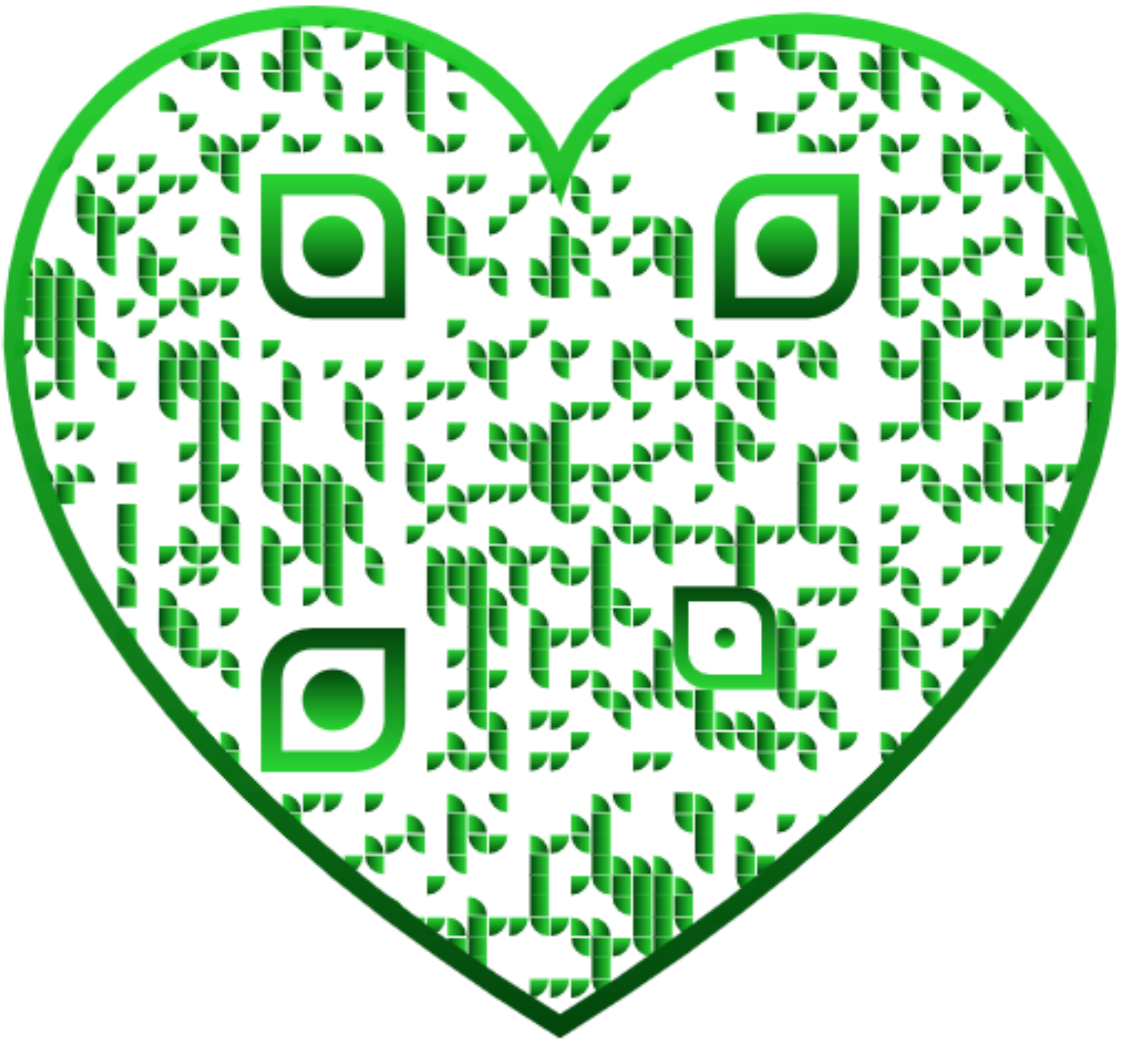

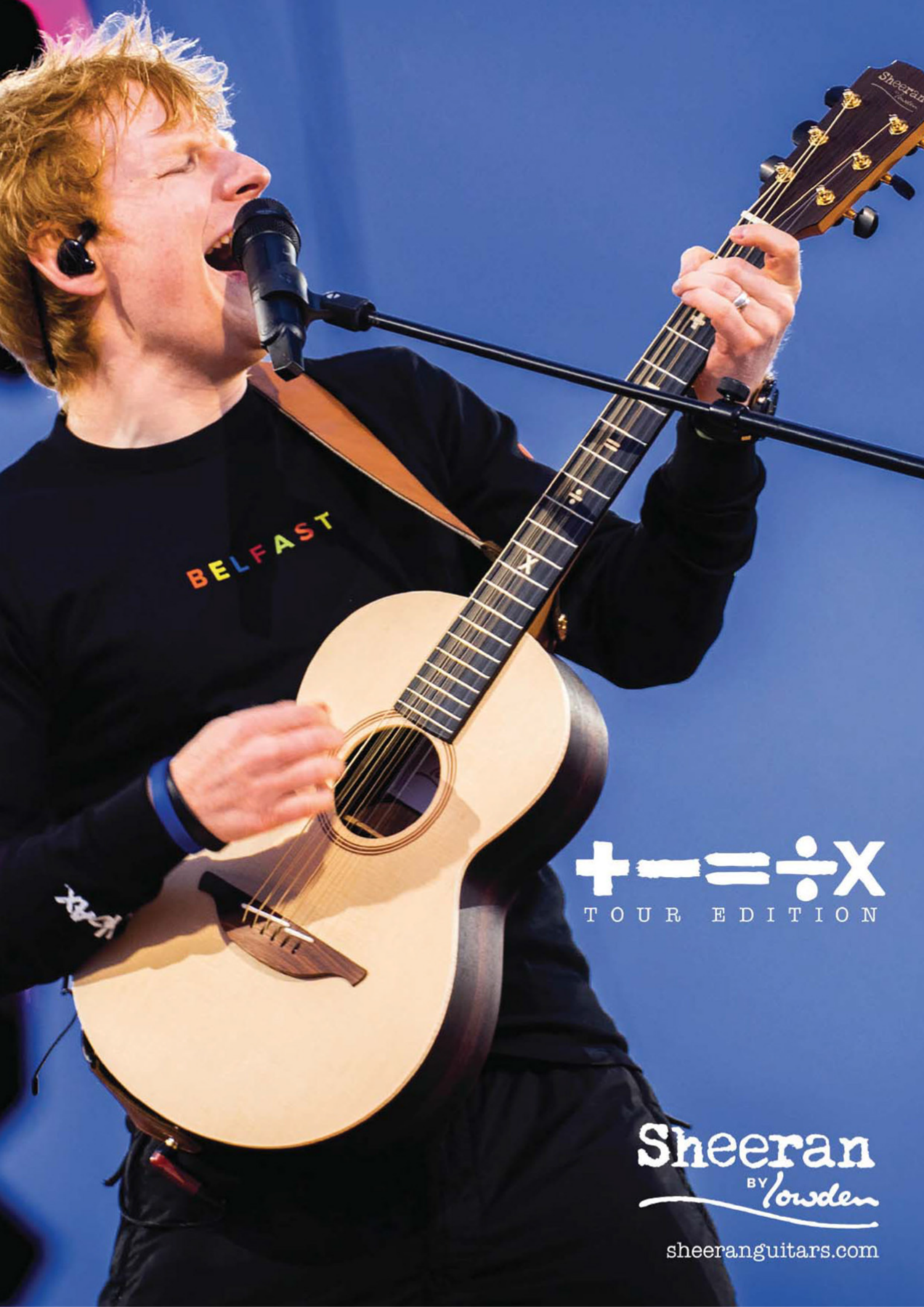
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First & Foremost

The Telecaster numbers among the innovations that poured from the Fender factory during the 1950s and many would argue that Leo's first solidbody guitar design was his best. Players from many different music genres sing its praises as it seems perfectly happy to adapt to any given music style you can name. Personally, I was late to the Tele party, resisting its charms on the basis that it was a country player's instrument – completely overlooking its thunderous presence on Led Zeppelin's first album, of course.

For me, my early wishlist comprised a Les Paul and the rest of the guitar universe was blinkered out. Fast forward a few years and my taste in guitars was a lot more liberal and I found myself in a band that decided to cover a few Rolling Stones numbers in its set. Being something of a purist, I decided that a Telecaster tuned to open G à la Keith Richards would be just the job and I plucked a Butterscotch Tele from the wall of my local music shop pretty much at random. Unfortunately, we didn't really bond and despite changing the bridge pickup for something a little more hefty, courtesy of Seymour Duncan, I ended up selling it on to a colleague from *Guitarist*'s photography squad, who absolutely loved it and I believe still has it in his collection.

The years rolled by and I suddenly felt the urge to steer down the Telecaster route once again, doubtless inspired by handling some of the Teles that appeared on my radar via the magazine. I began searching the internet and found one that took my fancy. Our eyes met across a crowded website and my Japanese '62 Vintage White Telecaster sits on a stand in my living room. Not as rare as the quartet featured in this month's issue, perhaps, but still a well played thing of wonder!

David Mead **Deputy Editor**

Editor's Highlights

Ariel Posen
The Canadian stringmeister pays us a visit for a quick catch up and a special video tour through his current pedalboard and guitars **p78**

Three-Watt Wonder
Laney's Supergroup LA-Studio head is a low-output amp aimed at the recording studio and home practice **p14**

Farewell Wilko
As we went to press with the last issue we heard about the passing of Wilko Johnson. Read Henry Yates' beautiful tribute to the man on **p40**

Guitarist

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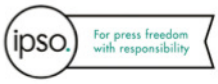

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Olly Curtis

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music radar SCAN TO GET OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

SCEPTRE VENTANA DELUXE
£649

WHAT IS IT? An affordable HSS 'SuperStrat' designed by Gary Levinson of Blade Guitars

Look Sharp

Tanglewood Guitars in the UK commissioned veteran guitar designer Gary Levinson to create a range of affordable but contemporary guitars. Here's the result

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

If you were playing guitar back in the late 80s and liked your gear, you would have undoubtedly come across Gary Levinson, the creator of Blade Guitars. To some, they were just another Strat-alike in some pretty contemporary colours, but virtually every facet of the benchmark design was re-evaluated, not least the dual-block Falcon vibrato and the onboard active VSC circuit, which offered a combined treble and bass boost or a midrange solo boost. For those pristine rhythm parts or gained leads – essential voices for the time – the Blade was the near-perfect tool.

Back to today and Gary's latest design venture is Sceptre, a mini-range of three electrics and a pair of basses commissioned by UK-based Tanglewood Guitars, known for its value-for-money acoustics that are distributed worldwide. Now, you might be groaning, 'Not another Fender-inspired 'new' design...' and we hear you. But with Gary at the drawing board there's got to be some merit, hasn't there? When this unshowy Ventana Deluxe arrived we plugged straight in and in moments concluded, 'We're good to go!'

There's no country of original label visible on the guitar yet Gary confirms it's Chinese-made – and rather well, too. The two-tone 'burst to the front reveals a stripped ash-looking body, though it's actually (two-piece) alder with a thin ash

VOLUME
TONE

1. Another take on the classic six-in-a-line headstock – that we have to say looks a little more Suhr-like than Fender. The bone nut is a nice touch

2. While there's no visible country of origin on the guitar, the neckplate holds the serial number. Also, the heel area is lightly dished to remove a little bulk

veneer to the front only. "We're using two- to three-piece bodies whereas, typically, in this price area you'd be looking at three to five pieces, sometimes more. Since I'm not into horizontal plywood, that was one spec that came in early on," Gary tells us from his HQ in Basel, Switzerland. "Originally, the factory used a swirly grain Mongolian ash veneer that looked like it should be on a piece of decorative furniture," he laughs. "It took me six months of hounding to get them to source the American white ash straight-grain veneer you see there."

"While we paid homage to the classics, we actually looked at it as making a more contemporary instrument" ***Gary Levinson***

3. These S-E2 single coils are purpose-designed by Gary Levinson for the Ventana and are classed as overwound – "a bit more bluesy than country", says Gary – with Alnico V magnetic poles in a vintage stagger

The body contours are well done, too. The rear ribcage cutaway is quite expansive, while the forearm bevel is quite deep with only a slight ridge as it graduates from the top into the curve. That old-school colour (there are a couple of more contemporary ones, too; see spec list) is contrasted by the blingier pearloid scratchplate, the usual dished S-style output jack plate is omitted in favour of a side-mounted output plate, and we get a simpler master volume/master tone control circuit. By design, this is a more contemporary take on that classic 69-year-old benchmark.

The actual outline is subtly modernised, too, with slightly thinner, more pointed horns, while the heel area is lightly dished, and the hard rock maple neck, which has a vintage-y tint to the satin finish, is topped off with a Suhr-alike black-faced headstock with rather large logos that are a little busy.

It might be lower-end in terms of price, but the six-screw Wilkinson vibrato is a tidy

4. The Wilkinson WOV02 vibrato may be built to a price, but it's nicely done, not least the push-fit tension-adjustable arm. Gary tells us the block saddles are a die-cast zinc alloy, like the full-size block, while the baseplate is hardened steel

UNDER THE HOOD

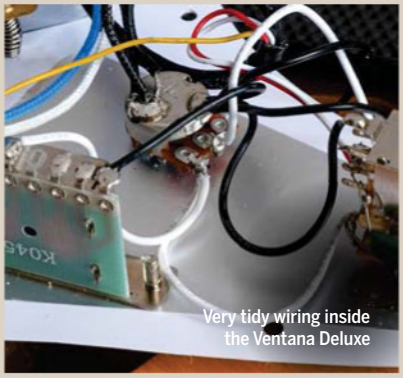
Neck off, scratchplate unscrewed – what do we find?

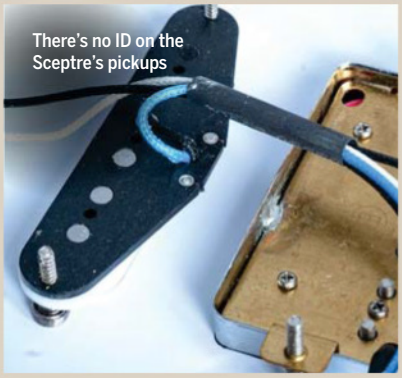
What you see on unscrewing the scratchplate is some very tidy wiring with cloth-covered wire from the single coils to the K045-labelled block pickup selector switch. The mini-pots are stamped 500k A, meaning audio taper, although both measured slightly lower, around 475kohms. The tone cap is a standard green mylar type 223J that means .022 microfarads.

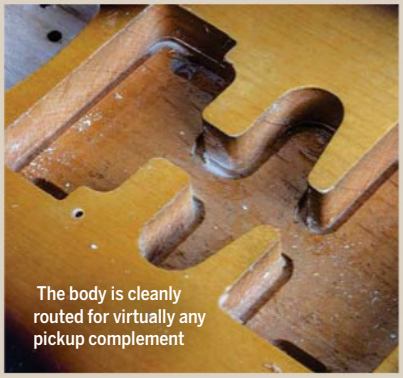
"All the pickups are my design, "confirms Gary Levinson, "they're not off-the-shelf pickups from another manufacturer. I always look at a guitar as a complete unit. I have an idea of what it's going to look and feel like, and what it's going to sound and play like. Here, I wanted the Ventana single coils to be a bit fatter, overwound, let's say a bit more bluesy than country."

There are no pickup IDs, just a 'B' stamp on the brass baseplate of the humbucker. The single coils use Alnico V slugs and are wound around plastic moulded bobbins that actually look a little textured with the covers removed, like fibre board. According to Gary Levinson, the single-coil pickups use 42 AWG plain enamel coil wire; the neck and middle are pretty overwound with DCRs of 9.58kohms and 9.23k, measured at output. The coils of the humbucker are wound to approximately 13.69k and use 43 AWG wire; the split, which voices the screw coil, measures 6.95k and proves a really good match for those hotter single coils.

Finally, note that the body is routed for HSH. This means that if you wanted to run SSS, HH and HSH configurations, you wouldn't need to rout the body yourself.


Very tidy wiring inside the Ventana Deluxe


There's no ID on the Sceptre's pickups


The body is cleanly routed for virtually any pickup complement

4

piece, not least its large deep-drilled full-size block and push-in tension-adjustable arm. "I called up my longtime friend Trev Wilkinson and said I wanted to work together with him on this," Gary tells us. "The Sceptre range wasn't supposed to be a range of vintage knock-offs; the idea from day one was, while we paid homage to the classic electric guitars, we actually looked at it as making a more contemporary instrument. I didn't want pressed saddles on the bridge, I wanted a block style, which I knew would give me a little fatter sound, and with Trev's stuff I knew the plating would be good, the baseplates [being] properly hardened steel." The smooth-actioned enclosed Der Jung tuners reflect modern over vintage style as well.

Like his Blade range, all the Sceptre pickups are designed by Gary, and are not off-the-shelf designs. The two single coils both have vintage staggered rod magnets with a measured 51.8mm spacing; the covered humbucker's slot-head poles are slightly wider at 52.5mm to match the bridge spacing.

Feel & Sounds

Weight-wise, the Ventana is in the right zone and feels pretty inviting from the off. While we didn't have a Blade RH-4 for

The control drive is simple and direct with a master tone control for all three pickups, unlike its inspiration. The beefy bridge humbucker can be coil-split via a pull switch on that tone control

comparison, our measurements from the 30th Anniversary Blade we reviewed back in issue 446 illustrate that the Ventana's neck is pretty similar in depth (20.9mm at the 1st fret and 21.9mm by the 12th), and although both share the same 43.5mm nut width, the Ventana's neck widens slightly as we move up. The fingerboard radius is the same as the Blade, too, at 240mm (9.5 inches). Fretwork appears good from a medium-low wire (approximately 2.64mm wide by 1mm high) and our setup was spot on: 1.5mm on the treble side, just a fraction higher on the bass side.

The detail is good here and those overwound sounds create a subtly different, bigger voice

Like any good HSS, this Ventana Deluxe has a very positive Jekyll and Hyde character. Using a PRS SE Silver Sky and a first-generation Fender Road Worn Strat as single-coil references, we'd be lying if we said the Ventana stood out as inferior. Listening with a pretty clean amp voice there's a really rather good balance of percussion and woody chop to be found from the neck, the middle is slightly more focused, and the neck/middle mix is quite full with the expected bounce and funk. Solo, the bridge humbucker is quite the contrast: big and powerful with a slightly cocked wah midrange character and rounded highs. With the humbucker split, however, which voices the screw coil, it sounds far from underpowered and is a great match for the single coils with a controlled high-end that sounds like you've just pulled the tone back a little. The Ventana comes across as a pretty cool, classic, rock-ready tool with that coil-split engaged. The full-coil bridge humbucker is almost your secret weapon if and when you really want to heat things up.

Verdict

Let's face it, there's no shortage of similarly priced HSS bolt-ons out there, particularly big-hitting industry standards such as Fender's Player Strat HSS and Yamaha's Pacifica 612V Mk II, to name but two. But the detail is good here and those overwound sounds create a subtly different, bigger voice that will have less appeal to the vintage crowd by design but more to those of us who need some tougher, meatier voices. Of course, it's a great platform for any modders, too, not least that the body already has an HSH rout so you could really take it wherever you wanted (maybe Sceptre could offer us some different SSS or HSH scratchplates?). So, granted, it's a crowded market, but this is a perfectly viable, well considered and executed entry. G

SCEPTRE VENTANA DELUXE

PRICE: £649
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Double-cut, solidbody electric
BODY: North American alder w/ striped ash facing
NECK: Slab-sawn hard rock maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.54mm
FINGERBOARD: Hard rock maple, black dot inlays, 240mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Wilkinson WOV02 vibrato, zinc die-cast saddles & full-size block, Der Jung DJ234 enclosed die-cast tuners – chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: Levinson Sceptre S-E2 Alnico V single coils (neck and middle), HB-E2 covered humbucker (bridge), 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and master tone (with pull-push coil-split switch)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.47/7.63
OPTIONS: Black walnut fingerboard w/ See-Through Red, Ocean Blue colours
RANGE OPTIONS: SSS Ventana Standard and T-style Arlington Standard (both £499)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: 2 Tone Sunburst (as reviewed), See-Through Red, Ocean Blue – high gloss polyester to body; vintage tinted satin to neck with black headstock face

Tanglewood Guitars
https://levinsonsceptre.com

8/10

PROS Good build for the money with contemporary aim; excellent hardware for the price point; 'hot' pickup voicing; simple drive

CONS No lefties; no gigbag; in a crowded market, is it different enough to make a mark?

Fiore
PLAY IN FULL BLOOM
MARK LETTIERI SIGNATURE MODEL
"All guitarists have a sound in their head – a sound that evolves and grows as they progress, discovering all of the beautiful idiosyncrasies that define their individual voice. To facilitate this process, players need a vibrant, dynamic guitar that becomes a free space in which their personality can unfold. PRS and I designed Fiore to be this guitar."
- Mark Lettieri
PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS
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POWER
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PRESENCE
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LANEY SUPERGROUP LA-STUDIO HEAD
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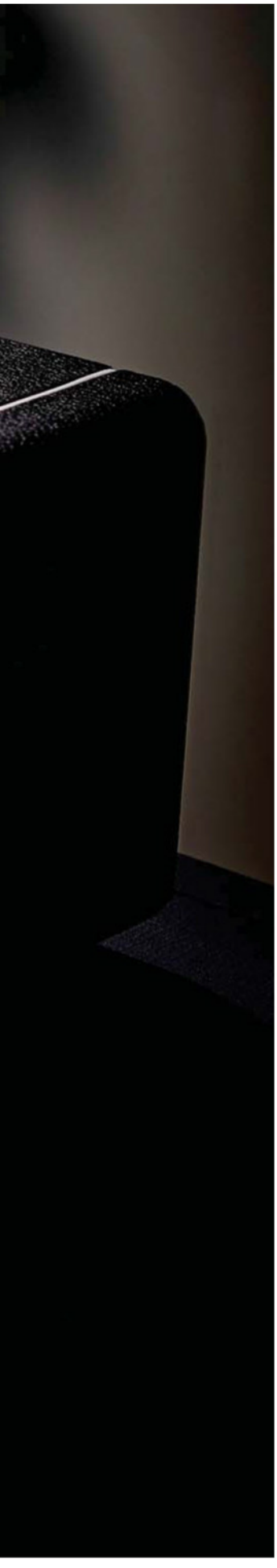
WHAT IS IT? UK-made specialised all-valve recording amp with embedded Two Notes Torpedo technology



Master Of Reality

The latest from Laney's flagship UK-designed and made Supergroup range offers real vintage valve tone combined with Two Notes cab emulation

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Phil Barker

History tends to focus on London and Liverpool as the two main epicentres of British popular music in the late 1960s, but there were others, of course, and one of the most notable was the West Midlands. From this area came Black Sabbath, The Move (which evolved into Electric Light Orchestra) and glam-rock legends Slade, among others. Back then, Laney founder Lyndon Laney was playing in a group called Band Of Joy, a collective of Black Country musicians that included Robert Plant and John Bonham. Lyndon's early interest in electronics and amplifiers led to him building his own – at first in his parent's garden shed and then in a unit in Digbeth as the business took off.

Ever since, Laney Amplification has successfully charted its own course through popular music trends and the ups and downs of British manufacturing. Today, its enviable user list includes Tony Iommi, Vernon Reid and Brazilian virtuoso Lari Basilio, with a resurgence of interest in the amp that drove what would become heavy metal – the Mark 1 Supergroup. Alongside the current reissued LA100SM and LA30BL heads, Laney recently introduced this specialised low-output recording version we have on review, the LA-Studio, which features built-in Two Notes Torpedo cabinet emulation technology.

The LA-Studio is a well-presented, good-looking compact head, styled to evoke the look of vintage Laneys from the late 60s. Attention to detail is everywhere, from the neatly applied white stringing around the plywood sleeve and salt-and-pepper grille, to the recessed serial number plate on the rear panel. We especially like the large skirted control knobs, which lend authentic vintage mojo to the LA-Studio and look very cool over the white-acrylic control panel.

The electronics are supported on a steel chassis with welded corners. There's a pair of small mains and output transformers and a choke, while inside the chassis most of the components live on two high-quality printed circuit boards. The main board includes sockets for all four of the LA-Studio's valves: a trio of 12AX7s in the preamp and a single 12BH7 in the output stage. The 12BH7 is a dual triode commonly used in early valve TVs from the

1. Attention to detail is everywhere, with cool features such as the vintage on/off switch bezels. The Brake switch drops the output from three watts to 0.1 watts for recording or low volume practice
2. The oversized skirted control knobs are another cool design feature, calling to mind classic Laney designs from the 1960s
3. Embedded Two Notes DynIR technology provides realistic speaker emulation with six pre-loaded virtual cabinets and more available via the Wall Of Sound app

1950s, which is best thought of as a larger version of the 12AX7 and produces around three watts with both halves running in a Class AB push-pull configuration. The output board holds the Two Notes speaker emulation chip, built-in reactive load and all the associated rear panel connectors. The build and wiring standard is excellent – this amp was made to look good and last.

The LA-Studio is a single channel, non-master volume design with a three-band passive EQ and a traditional presence control operating in the output stage. There are two pairs of input jacks named Bass and Treble. Bass provides a flattish response and works best with pedals, while Treble has extra highs and upper mids. Both the Treble and Bass inputs have low and high gain options – input 1 is high gain, while input 2 is lower gain, and you can get more tonal variation by jumpering the input jacks with a short patch cable.

Next to the power switch is a second toggle that selects the LA-Studio's Brake power reduction, dropping output from around three to 0.1 watts, for quiet practice or conventional recording.

The rear panel is where you'll find the ins and outs for the LA-Studio's Two Notes Torpedo cabinet emulation – it's a full install with a few more features than we've seen on other similarly equipped amps. There's a six-position cabinet selector and a Level control, with a Peak level indicator, MIDI In/Out/Thru sockets and a ground lift switch. Outputs include a 3.5mm headphone jack and a mono balanced XLR for connection to consoles or your favourite audio interface.

A USB 'B' socket lets you access the Two Notes tech with the Torpedo Remote desktop app, from where you can edit, save, store and load your favourite settings into the LA-Studio's six onboard slots. The built-in high-quality reactive load means the LA-Studio can be used without a speaker cabinet, sending audio to the DI and headphones without any loss of tone or dynamics. There's a pair of eight- and 16-ohm speaker jacks as well, so you can connect to any cabinet with a matching impedance. Overall, Laney's LA-Studio is a serious professional tool, with build quality and good looks to match.

When even three watts is too much, the Brake switch drops the output to a miniscule 0.1 watts

Feel & Sounds

We tried out the LA-Studio with a selection of guitars, including our Strat and Les Paul, together with a superb borrowed '63 reissue Gibson ES-335. Used into a 1x12 Creamback-loaded cabinet, the LA-Studio has a warm and very dynamic tone with a sweet treble, which sounds spot on for late-60s and early 70s classic rock. There's just the right amount of bite from our Strat's bridge pickup and a satisfying crunch from the Les Paul, with smooth vocal soloing from the 335.

There's no master volume, but with a maximum output of three watts it can be turned all the way up without being unsociably loud. For occasions when even three watts is too much, engaging the Brake attenuator drops the output down to a

You can plug the LA-Studio into real speaker cabinets as well, with a choice of eight- or 16-ohm loads. A built-in reactive load means you don't have to have a cabinet connected all the time

miniscule 0.1 watts – quiet enough to talk over, even with the controls on maximum.

The passive EQ is excellent; the Bass, Mid and Treble controls interact smoothly and predictably, with no troublesome peaks or dips. The amp stays more or less clean until around the halfway mark, after which it begins to distort in a very pleasing way with just a hint of fuzzbox at full tilt.

Like most other Two Notes-equipped products, the emulation doesn't appear on the main speaker, so you need to use the headphones or DI output to hear it. We plugged the LA-Studio into a small PA to check out the six virtual cab presets, all of which were more or less usable straight out of the box. The Torpedo remote app is a breeze to use and lets you experiment with all kinds of parameters including cabinet type, room size and microphone position to dial in your ideal virtual recording environments. With just a few minutes of tweaking, it's possible to create highly realistic virtual cabinets and rooms that sound superb, saving hours of time auditioning hundreds of IRs to find the one you need. If your rig is powered by MIDI, you'll be pleased to hear the Two Notes module also accepts Program Change and Continuous Controller commands.

Verdict

Laney is on a roll at the moment with a full catalogue of products to suit any musical genre, and the LA-Studio is another desirable addition. The Two Notes cabinet emulation gives the amp practically infinite flexibility, saving your DAW's processing power for other things in the studio, with the potential for live use when connected to a PA. In this scenario, it's ideal for quiet stage applications such as theatres and churches, with the built-in reactive load replacing a conventional loudspeaker, while sending the LA-Studio's cabinet-emulated output to a console.

With famous users including Tony Iommi and Lari Basilio, the LA-Studio is aimed primarily at guitarists who want full-on vintage valve sounds for recording or internet broadcast. It's hardly an impulse purchase, but with everything considered, we reckon it's great value for money. Definitely one to check out. G

LANEY SUPERGROUP LA-STUDIO HEAD

PRICE: £849
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Valve preamp, valve power amp
OUTPUT: 3W RMS
VALVES: 3x 12AX7; 1x 12BH7
DIMENSIONS: 520 (w) x 220 (d) x 229mm (h)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 7.8/17.2
CABINET: Plywood
CHANNELS: 1
CONTROLS: Presence, bass, middle, treble, gain, brake switch. DI cabinet select, volume level, ground lift
FOOTSWITCH: None
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Embedded full Two Notes Torpedo technology with 6-position virtual cab selector, level control, ground lift, balanced XLR out, headphones out, USB, MIDI in, MIDI out/thru, peak indicator LED
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Other amps in Laney's Supergroup range include the LA30BL head (£919), and the point-to-point hand-wired LA100SM (£2,299)

Laney Amplification
0121 508 6666
www.laney.co.uk

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Good-looking, beautifully finished; typically high attention to detail; accurate vintage valve sound; low output and low noise are ideal for recording; embedded Two Notes Torpedo DynIR technology and MIDI

CONS Low-power output means you can't easily use it for the average unmic'd pub gig; we'd like to see a slightly higher-powered combo version

KERNOM RIDGE AUGMENTED ANALOG OVERDRIVE PEDAL
£269

WHAT IS IT? Overdrive pedal with continuously variable analogue clipping options

Fly Drive

A new approach to clipping circuits from Kernom aims to offer all the overdrive sounds you need in a single pedal

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

1. The Mood knob's continuous control delivers all the clipping flavours from soft to very compressed, symmetrical and asymmetrical
2. The Pre Tone knob acts before the clipping stage, adjusting the way the pedal reacts to your guitar. All three tone knobs have a neutral setting
3. Press and hold the Preset footswitch to save the current position of the knobs as a preset

There is a type of pedal that delivers variations on its overdrive voice via a switchable selection of clipping options – and this certainly offers versatility. But the Kernom Ridge goes further by delivering its clipping options via a rotary Mood knob, the actual overdrive voice being determined by the knob's position. The new technology behind this, 'analog morphing core', is said to control the non-linear elements of the clipping stage, changing their threshold in real-time. Kernom says the Mood knob is roughly divided into five segments, running from a clean and open sound through transparent overdrive, a more coloured overdrive and high gain, to 'almost fuzz'. We found that those descriptions are accurate, but it's not a totally seamless shift through them as there's a distinct jump from the first to the second segment. Generally, though, it's a smooth gradation along the knob's travel, allowing extensive nuance in choosing your overdrive's character.

All the controls are highly interactive, including Volume and Drive working in conjunction with the Mood knob and a trio of knobs offering comprehensive tonal sculpting and shading. Pre Tone adjusts the EQ before the signal hits the circuitry and has a big influence on the nature of the drive, perhaps by making your bottom-end a bit leaner. Post Tone adjusts the output EQ to set things up for the rest of the chain and is great for getting the sound to sit right with your amp, while Mid has influence on the overall drive character – turn it left to scoop the midrange, while right gives you more presence.

The upshot of all this control is that the Ridge is an extremely versatile pedal that not only gives you the opportunity to dial in a huge range of original drive tones but can also accurately mimic just about any drive pedal. You can quickly save a dialled-in sound to one internal preset, recalled by the Preset footswitch, so you can have instant access to two drive variations – which can actually be morphed between if you plug in an expression pedal. Via MIDI, you get access to 128 presets and continuous control over parameters.

Verdict

A truly chameleon-like overdrive pedal that can provide everything from clean boost upwards, the Ridge gives you a massive range of options in shaping your sound and has practical facilities for onstage use.

THE RIVALS

The use of a continuous control knob for dialling in clipping options is unique to the Ridge, but the Walrus Audio Ages Five-State Overdrive (£199) offers five different silicon and LED clipping options from a rotary switch, while the Tsakalis AudioWorks Six (€209) is a fully analogue pedal featuring a six-position rotary switch and is designed to deliver the tones of some well-known pedals. Known for their versatility are a couple of homegrown pedals: Hamstead Soundworks' Odyssey (£255) features three clipping circuits, while the Origin Effects RevivalDRIVE (£319) recreates a valve amp-style signal path in all-analogue electronics.

Hamstead's Odyssey pedal offers three clipping circuits

KERNOM RIDGE AUGMENTED ANALOG OVERDRIVE PEDAL

PRICE: £269
ORIGIN: France
TYPE: Overdrive pedal
FEATURES: True bypass with relay, 1 onboard preset (128 accessible via MIDI), High (Punishing) Voltage mode, expression pedal capability
CONTROLS: Volume, Mid, Mood, Drive, Post Tone, Pre Tone, Bypass footswitch, Preset footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, standard EXP pedal input, MIDI In, MIDI Out
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 250mA minimum (300mA recommended)
DIMENSIONS: 164 (w) x 112(d) x 52mm (h)

Andertons
01483 456777
www.kernom.com

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS One pedal with many different overdrive sounds; really robust build; flexible EQ options; MIDI functions; expression pedal morphing between sounds

CONS Power adaptor not supplied; slight footswitch lag; not particularly compact

FREE THE TONE
COSMIC WAVE CW-1Y
MULTIPLE FILTERING DELAY
£279

WHAT IS IT? Digital delay with multiple filter functions to process the delay sound

Eccentric Echo

It might be small, but Free The Tone's latest has all the facilities to really shape the sound of your delay trails

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

1. The display shows the preset number and name or parameters for each function over three pages
2. Press Home to change the display; it scrolls through showing preset number/ name and the three parameter pages
3. The Tap footswitch is used to input tap tempo, but a press-and-hold recalls presets 1 or 2 – the LED for the selected one lights up, while the other flashes at the tempo rate

The Cosmic Wave retains the sound quality of Free The Tone's Flight Time and Future Factory delays but is a much more compact pedal. Despite its small footprint, though, it still manages to fit in a pair of footswitches plus mono and stereo operation, and MIDI and expression pedal inputs. What you're getting is a pedal with pretty comprehensive control over the character of its repeats via the application of multiple filter functions.

While the top three knobs may seem to be standard for a delay pedal, controlling Dry/Wet Mix, Feedback and Tone, they can each adjust two further parameters (mainly relating to modulation and EQ) when the relevant operation screens are called up by the Home switch. The Delay Time knob does even more: besides adjusting its three parameters in the operation screens, it scrolls through the 128 onboard preset slots and also adjusts any of the potent sound-shaping functions called up via the cursor buttons.

At its most conventional you can get pristine digital delays with repeats identical to the dry sound. But that's simply the starting point – there's plenty of EQ that can be applied to tweak the tonal component of the repeats and there's a wide range of modulation from a bit of tape-delay wobble through lush chorus to really OTT stuff. Beyond that, you can shake things up further by bringing in as many of the special functions as desired. You can get into crusty Lo-Fi areas by adjusting the number of bits in the delay sound over a range from 24 to eight in 1-bit units and you can apply a Bandpass filter with a choice of five frequency ranges.

The Reverse delay function can deliver deliciously smooth psych effects if you select it without any dry sound. But the Cosmic function may be the most unique feature with its choice of five different filter settings making consecutive repeats in the trail get progressively weirder.

For performance, there's footswitch access to two presets, tap tempo, the ability to assign a range of functions to an expression pedal or momentary footswitch, plus MIDI for parameter change or preset recall.

Verdict

If you want the ultimate control over the sound of your repeats, this compact powerhouse will provide it. With delays from the traditional to the (yep) cosmic, this would be a versatile sonic asset for any pedalboard.

THE RIVALS

Because there are so many delay pedals, each with different sets of functions, it's difficult to pick out anything that's the precise equivalent of the Cosmic Wave. But if you're looking for something equally pedalboard-friendly with a range of different delay sounds, the Walrus Audio Mako D1 V2 (£279) has plenty in its favour, including five delay programs with tweaking options, presets and tap tempo. Then there's the TC Electronic Flashback 2 (£119), which has the ability to load TonePrints, giving it real versatility. For another creative delay, check out Eventide's Rose (£359) where there's loads of sonic territory to explore.

The Eventide Rose has a broad range of creative options for you to prune

FREE THE TONE
COSMIC WAVE CW-1Y MULTIPLE FILTERING DELAY

PRICE: £279
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Delay pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, 128 user presets, 11 factory-programmed presets, kill dry function, trails on/off function, delay phase inversion
CONTROLS: Mix, Feedback, Tone, Delay Time (Param), 4x Buttons (Save, Home, Cursor L, Cursor R), Bypass footswitch, Tap footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input (TRS), standard output L, standard output R, standard EXP/CV/FS input, MIDI In
POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 185 mA
DIMENSIONS: 66 (w) x 125 (d) x 54mm (h)

Free The Tone
www.freethetone.com

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Compact size; a myriad of parameters to adjust; presets; tap tempo

CONS No issues, but it may not be for you if want something that's more 'plug in and play'

theWishlist

Dream gear to beg, borrow and steal for...

Paoletti Richard Fortus Signature #3 £3,705

CONTACT **Barnes & Mullins** WEB **www.paolettiguitars.com** WORDS **Dave Burrluck** PHOTOGRAPHY **Phil Barker**

Fans of boutique guitars – and indeed Richard Fortus – will no doubt have come across Tuscany-made Paoletti Guitars, founded by Fabrizio Paoletti in 2005. This new signature, launched in 2021, is Richard's third and is the most stripped-down of the three. It comes without the leather front, yet the 'Junior' style is retained along with the full 648mm (25.5-inch) scale bolt-on neck from Canadian roasted maple with its reverse headstock. And, quite famously, the bodies of Paoletti guitars are made from chestnut reclaimed from 130- to 170-year-old wine barrels.

There's an intended simplicity to this build that's very much part of its purposeful vibe. The 45mm centre-joined, two-piece, single-cut slab body with small Tele-style edge radius has no time for comfort contours. Its striped grain, not dissimilar to ash, laps up the almost beige '1/05 White' coating, which is worn around the edges and in numerous places on the face and back.

Colour-wise, the roasted maple neck is perfectly matched with a typical light caramel hue. The separate fingerboard has a 305mm (12-inch) radius and big jumbo Dunlop 6110 frets, all beautifully rounded and polished, while the white face dots have a pearl-like shimmer. Only the enclosed Kluson tuners are shiny-plated, the rest of the hardware has a duller metallic sheen, and the control plate and two-piece scratchplate appear to have a thin plastic protection (which we're not sure if we're supposed to remove or whether the mottled, aged effect is part of the plan). Paoletti's left-hand-style partially walled bridge is a superb centrepiece, too, and uses block saddles.

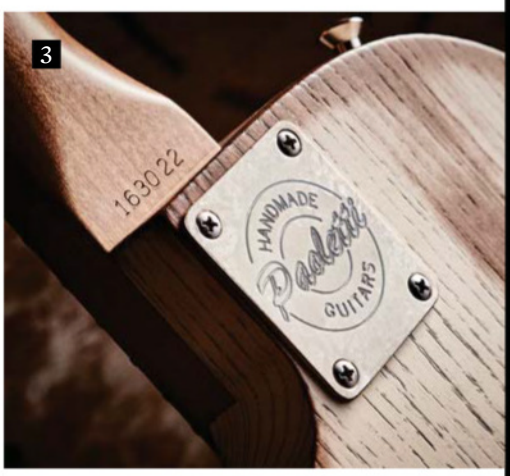
Weighing in at a manageable 3.77kg (8.3lbs) it's probably the first chestnut-bodied guitar we've played – and paired with the hardware and pickups here it really has quite a voice. The bridge pickup isn't overpowered or overbright, and not for the first time do we wonder if Leo got his tilt right. There's a very vocal midrange character that really grinds with some gain and, by design, the volume cleans up well without sounding overbright when pulled back. This "secret" circuit also works well on the bigger-sounding P-90 at the neck, moving from Santana-esque leads to jazz comping with just a twist of the volume, while the pickup mix does a Keef-to-indie jangle in an instant.

This multi-voiced guitar covers a lot more ground than its rock 'n' roll connections might suggest. And if you hurry you can snag this very guitar at Guitar Village in the UK (www.guitarvillage.co.uk). G

1. This reverse 'left-handed' headstock features on all three signatures. "It gives more [perceived] tension on the lower strings, less on the high strings," says Richard. "The low strings are more piano-like, the high strings are easier to bend"

2. The walled bridge is also left-handed so the pickup tilts in the opposite angle. "The higher strings are warmer sounding and the lower strings are brighter – the Hendrix trick," says Richard

3. This 'Junior' style has a bolt-on neck. Like the rest of the body there are no contours in the heel area, while the serial number is stamped at the base of the neck



4. The neck shape is well done: 42.5mm wide at the nut, 52.2mm by the 12th with a pretty full C-meets-D profile that's 22mm in depth at the 1st and 24.8mm by the 12th. Mind you, getting to the truss-rod adjustment means removing the main scratchplate

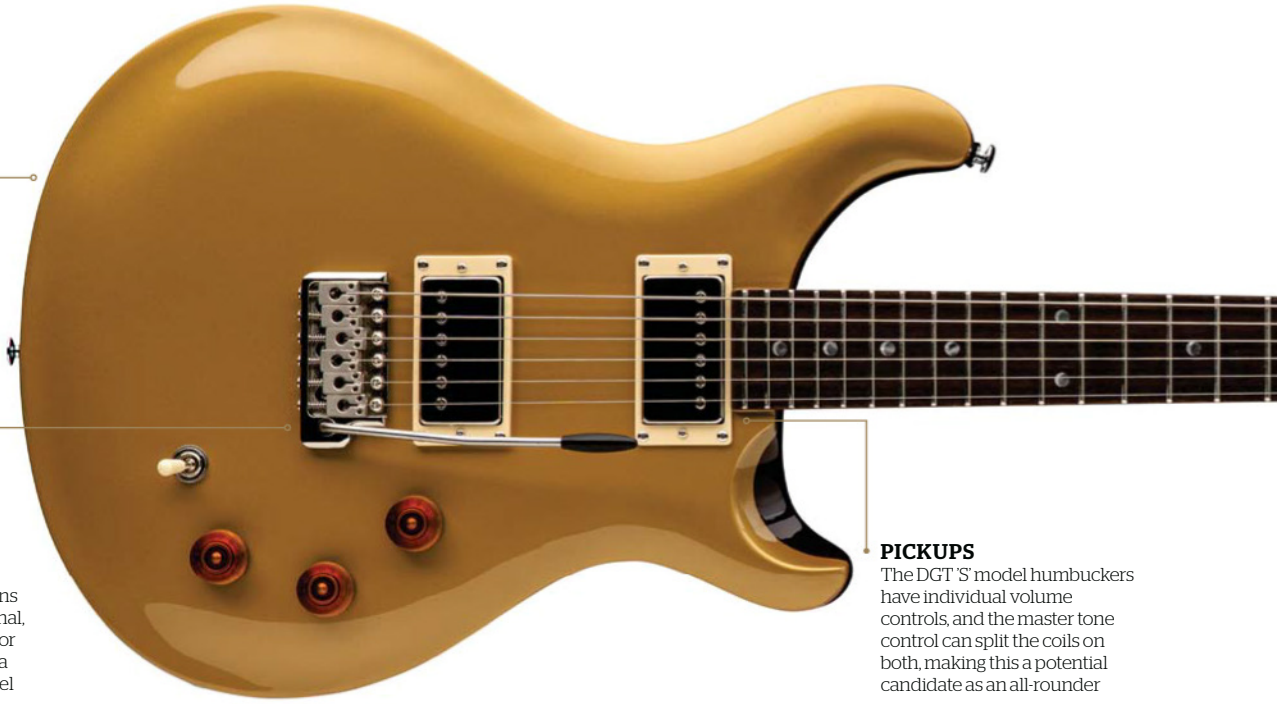
5. The bridge pickup is a "copy of my '51 Nocaster pickup", says Richard. It uses Alnico V reverse stagger rod magnets with a measured DCR of 6.95kohms. The soapbar single coil at the neck measures 7.37k and uses an Alnico V bar magnet

6. Like Richard's signature Gretsch G6636T-RF, the volume control is designed to clean up well, something Paoletti calls its "secret" circuit. It's actually a standard treble bleed with a 680 picofarads capacitor and 470k resistor, in parallel, across the 250k volume control. Note the control knobs – shotgun shell cases from Italy's Nobel Sport

Gas Supply

Our pick of the month's most delectable and wallet-bothering new gear

MCCARTY BODY
The SE DGT has its roots in PRS's McCarty model, which David Grissom helped to develop almost 30 years ago



VIBRATO
The SE model maintains the vibrato of the original, raising the, ahem, bar for what is available from a McCarty-derived model

PICKUPS
The DGT 'S' model humbuckers have individual volume controls, and the master tone control can split the coils on both, making this a potential candidate as an all-rounder

PRS SE DGT From £979

CONTACT **PRS Guitars Europe** PHONE **01223 874301** WEB **www.prsguitars.com**

JARGON CRUNCHING
DGT 'S' humbuckers
Central to the DGT's design is the PRS Patented Trem, but as well as that, the pickup controls add individual volume blending to the McCarty-bodied family. What may seem like a fairly obvious feature is actually only available via the DGT models in this configuration.

Last time you featured a PRS DGT in these pages it cost more than my car. What's this?
'This' is great news for anyone who's a fan of PRS's DGT model – the signature guitar for session ace David Grissom (Dixie Chicks, Buddy Guy, Bob Dylan and more). That's because for the first time ever, the DGT model has made its way into the brand's more affordable SE range.

I've heard of the DGT, what's so good about it?
Well, there's a lot to talk about, but as you'd expect from a player who jumps between different musical settings, the jewel in the DGT's crown has always been versatility. It's based around the McCarty model, which David had a hand in realising and used as his main guitars for a number of years. But there's a number of differences that have made the DGT a brilliant do-it-all guitar for studio and live use.

Go on, spill it.
For a start, there's the name. DG is obvious, and the 'T' stands for trem. It's the only McCarty-ish model that features a vibrato in the PRS line-up and David's initial prototypes turned a lot of heads. But as well as this there's some detail in the fretwire, with David opting for larger-than-usual wire gauge.

A vibrato and some different frets. What else does the new SE have to offer?
Remember we said versatility is a big thing? Well, the DGT features a pair of DGT 'S' model humbuckers, with each pickup given its own volume control (another exclusive feature in the McCarty stable). As well as this, there's a global coil-split via the master tone control for single-coil sounds.

What about the guitar's build?
The SE model follows the recipe of the US-made DGT. That's a mahogany body, capped with a maple top and carved to PRS's Shallow Violin profile. The neck is mahogany, with a 254mm (10-inch) radius, rosewood fretboard, and the scale is PRS's traditional 635mm (25-inch) length, with 22 frets.

FINISHES
We get a choice of McCarty Tobacco Sunburst or Gold Top, and the fretboard inlays are specific to each finish

What about the finishes?

There's the stylish McCarty Tobacco Sunburst (£1,049), which also features a flame maple veneer and has the famous PRS birds laid into the fretboard. If you're after something a little more vintage-looking, you can go for the Gold Top version (£979), which has the more understated Moon inlays instead; David's USA signature is the only Core model to feature these.

It sounds like this could be a workhorse in a covers situation.

We're yet to try one (look out for the full review next issue), but yes. Both versions come with a PRS gigbag, and we should see these emerging in stores in the next few months. We'll let David have the last word: "I didn't just rubber-stamp this," he says. "This guitar is something I have been very involved in and am really proud of. The SE Series is light-years ahead of anything I could get my hands on when I started playing – it's amazing how far the quality has come – and I am proud to be able to offer this guitar to more people." **[SW]**

ALSO OUT NOW...

ORIGIN EFFECTS M-EQ DRIVER £259

The adaptive EQ of Pultec's 50s studio units has made them a sought-after classic. For its latest pedal, Origin has set about harnessing the tonal flavour of Pultec's design into an overdrive pedal. The Origin M-EQ Driver features the usual gain and volume controls we'd expect but throws in a three-position Mids selector that can deliver a 'mid hum' all the way up to a full cocked wah sound. The adaptive part of the Pultec-inspired circuit means that your drive stays warmer at lower gain settings, and receives some additional bite as you ramp up the drive. It's made in the UK, and is available now for £259.

www.origineffects.com

LACE CIGAR BOX ELECTRICS £349

Nothing says 'vintage vibe' like a guitar made out of an old stogy (box), and that's exactly what Lace is turning its hand to now with its Cigar Box Electric series. There are three- and four-string models in the line-up, with 10 Americana-themed designs to choose from across the board. Each guitar features the US-made Matchbook pickup, which offers "double-coil power and single coil clarity" thanks to a push-pull split. The bodies themselves are made from pressboard, mahogany veneer and Canadian maple bracing inside, and there's an optional hard case (£109) if you plan on taking it down to the crossroads.

www.jhs.co.uk

Fretbuzz

A monthly look at must-hear artists from all corners of the guitar world, from the roots of their sound to the tracks that matter most

Artist: Ed Clarke (Brave Rival)

Album: Life's Machine (Self-released)

Life's Machine, Brave Rival's debut album, is out now on CD and vinyl **https://braverival.com**

Lead guitarist Ed 'The Shred' Clarke is one fifth of Portsmouth blues-rock outfit Brave Rival, who formed in 2019. Underpinned by some particularly silky guitar licks, the band deliver big when it comes to power and energy. As such, you'd be forgiven for thinking Ed came into this world with a Strat strapped onto him, but his first route into the instrument was much more humble. "My uncle gave me a three-quarter-sized classical guitar when I was about six," he says. "I didn't know what to do with it, but then I saw him playing electric guitar in his band and I thought, 'Wow! I want to do *that*.' I learned some basic chords, until someone played me Guns N' Roses' *Appetite For Destruction*. So Slash was the one who got me started on the whole lead-guitar thing."

Melodic Chops

The GN'R man still continues to inform Ed's guitar playing to this day: "What I love is that although Slash is flashy, he doesn't just shred. There is melody in everything he does. He repeats melodic phrases – *November Rain* and *Sweet Child O' Mine* are examples of it. It's easy for us guitarists to say, 'More notes!', but with Slash there is always melody underneath it all." But it's not just his childhood hero who is now influencing Ed's playing. "More recently, I've been listening to Chris Buck, John Mayer and Joe Bonamassa," he shares. "They also have the technical chops, but there's emotion, too."

Creative Space

As Ed looks past the shredding to what lies beneath, the idea of creating space is just as crucial. "I find doing more with less notes important," he says. "BB King was the master of it; he could hit one note and it would be a better solo than anyone else could play. The way he would play the note would be incredible and he would feel every second of it. That's what gets me excited about guitar. It's the emotion that you can evoke with it."

Natural Chemistry

Brave Rival's line-up sees Ed playing alongside bassist Billy Dedman, drummer Donna Peters and singers Chloe Josephine and Lindsey Bonnick. "I always thought two guitars was the way, but now I find [that format] restricting," Ed says. "In Brave Rival I'm the only harmonic instrument most of the time, so that gives me freedom to do what I want without [having to be] aware of another guitarist. So often in bands, the other guitarist would come up with something and jam it with bass and drums and I wouldn't be needed! In Brave Rival, when there's an idea, I can go wherever I like."

The Name Game

When we inevitably get on to gear chat, Ed lets us in on a secret. "I name my guitars," he says. "Don't judge me – I just find they all have different personalities. You could buy an identical guitar to this and it wouldn't be 'Sally'... It's a 2019 Fender American Professional special run that they did. I wanted a Strat and had a budget in mind, saw this one and the budget went out the window. I regret nothing! As soon as I got it, I stopped playing every other guitar. This is my 'Lucille': if it gets broken, I will fix it. It won't get replaced. People say that old guitars are the best, but I can't fault this one." **[GK]**

Pictured right with his beloved Am Pro 'Sally', Ed is a Strat devotee. In reference to one of his big influences, BB King, he considers that guitar to be his 'Lucille'

PHOTO BY GRAHAM HUTTON

Standout track: *Guilty Love*
For fans of: John Mayer, Joe Bonamassa, Fleetwood Mac

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Pedals are very much a supporting act in Ed's rig, and yet he just can't resist collecting them

Looking at Ed's gear list, we're struck by the amount of pedals: J Rockett Archer, Fulltone OCD, Ibanez Tube Screamer Mini, Marshall Bluesbreaker Mk1, TC Electronic Spark Mini Booster, Flashback Mini Delay and Hall Of Fame Mini Reverb, Xotic SP Compressor, Line 6 HX Stomp, Symbiosis Effects Fuzz and Hudson Dual Broadcast – plus The GigRig QuarterMaster QMX-6 Switcher for easy switching. "To be fair, I don't have all of that on my pedalboard and I force myself not to have a bigger 'board," he says. "There is an element of, 'Let's try this and see where it goes,' but I try not to rely on pedals. I have my sound and I control it from the volume knob on my guitar. I turn to effects only when I'm after something that [my guitar] can't provide."

PHOTO BY LA PHOTO

THE LINEUP

Albums

The month's best guitar music – a hand-picked selection of the finest fretwork on wax

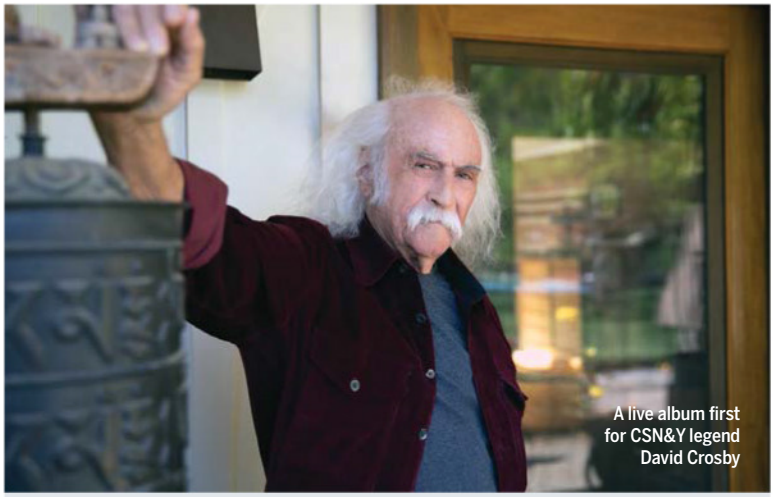


PHOTO BY ANNA WEBBER

A live album first for CSN&Y legend David Crosby

David Crosby & The Lighthouse Band

Live At Capitol Theatre

BMG (available now)

9/10

First ever solo live album from songwriting legend

Back in 2016 David Crosby released his album entitled *Lighthouse* and has continued to work with the band he assembled to accompany him on that release ever since. The Lighthouse Band comprises Becca Stevens, Michelle Willis and Snarky Puppy founder and bassist Michael League. Remarkably, this is the first live release from Croz as a solo artist and that fact is celebrated by an accompanying release of the full concert on DVD. The recording is taken from Croz and the band's 2018 tour in support of the album *Here If You Listen*.

Even in his late 70s as he was at the time of the recording – he's 81 now – Croz has lost none of the soaring power of his vocals and his songwriting is still as strong as ever. Acknowledging on mic to the Capitol Theatre's audience that he has a reputation for straying from convention the live set begins with two new compositions, *The Us Below* and *Things We Do For Love* – both mellow and beautiful with engaging harmony vocals that will inevitably draw comparisons with Croz's glory days with Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. The rest of the album follows suit with some gorgeous arrangements of solo material – although it's not until track 12 that he tips a hat to CSN&Y with a stunning version of *Guinnevere*, with *Déjà Vu* and Joni Mitchell's *Woodstock* following closely behind.

From a true legend in the annals of songwriting and performing – co-founding The Byrds and CSN&Y alone guarantees him musical immortality – the album is a celebration of the craft. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Déjà Vu*
For fans of: CSN&Y, Joni Mitchell

Kenny Wayne Shepherd

Trouble Is... 25

Provogue Records (available now)

9/10

Born-again burning blues from KWS

Some 25 years after its first release, Kenny Wayne Shepherd has re-recorded *Trouble Is*. The 1997 album helped put him on the map as an outstanding blues musician at the ripe young age of 18, enthused with great songs and impressive Hendrix/SRV guitar theatrics. Comparisons could be made between 1997 and 2022, but it's worthwhile listening to this with fresh ears as Kenny and his band show just how great the songs are and what years of performing them live can do. His guitar chops and tones have a power that only time on the road and experience can enrich – and there's a lot of guitar on this album that shows his rhythmic, chordal and soloing appeal. Take *Slow Ride* with its funky groove and tons of great guitar, for example, then you have the Strat strutting of *True Lies*, which is perfect for driving to, while *Everything Is Broken* evokes considerable SRV magic. The stinging solo on the Hendrix's *I Don't Live Today* is quite something, as is the Texas swagger of *Somehow, Somewhere, Someway*. Brilliant, burning blues. **[JS]**

Standout track: *I Don't Live Today*
For fans of: Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughan

Gary Moore

A Different Beat

BMG (available now)

8/10

90s solo outing receives a vinyl revisit

Originally released in 1999, *A Different Beat* is now receiving its first ever release on double vinyl. But those whose record players are long gone need not despair as the album is available in a deluxe CD format, too, both editions including brand-new liner notes. The album was Gary's 12th solo release and finds him trying to shake off the 'back to the blues' image from earlier that decade by experimenting with a different, more pop/rock approach. But, as the saying goes, you can take the man out of blues, but you can't take blues out of the man – and Gary's roots are showing throughout the album. *Worry No More* has a harder edge and some great guitar playing, while *Surrender* is a dark ballad with some masterful soloing. Not his best album, perhaps, but still plenty to enjoy. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Surrender*
For fans of: Joe Bonamassa, Rory Gallagher

Orianthi is back with her fifth solo album, *Rock Candy*

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROCK CANDY PROMO

Orianthi
Rock Candy
Frontiers Music (available now)
8/10

The PRS-wielding rocker releases her follow-up to 2020's *O*

From the opening instrumental, *Illuminate (Pt 1)*, with its Vai-like tone and phrasing, through to the penultimate pounding pop stomper, *Getting To Me*, with its searing pentatonic licks and string bends, this 11-track album rocks like crazy. *Light It Up* would be a good gig opener with four-on-the-floor drums, an infectious drop D riff and big vocal stacks. The country pop-rocker *Where Did Your Heart Go* features melancholic verses and screaming choruses with bluesy guitar fills and screaming bends in the solo, while *Red Light* pumps hard, reminiscent of US bands like Nickleback, and the solo ends with a 'blink and you'll miss it' arpeggio lick that evokes Paul Gilbert chops. The electronically-infused *Void* switches between frugal verse and huge chorus arrangements with a powerful octaver effect on the guitar riff. If you fancy a genre mash-up of catchy songs from one of rock's premier guitarists, this is highly recommended. **[JS]**

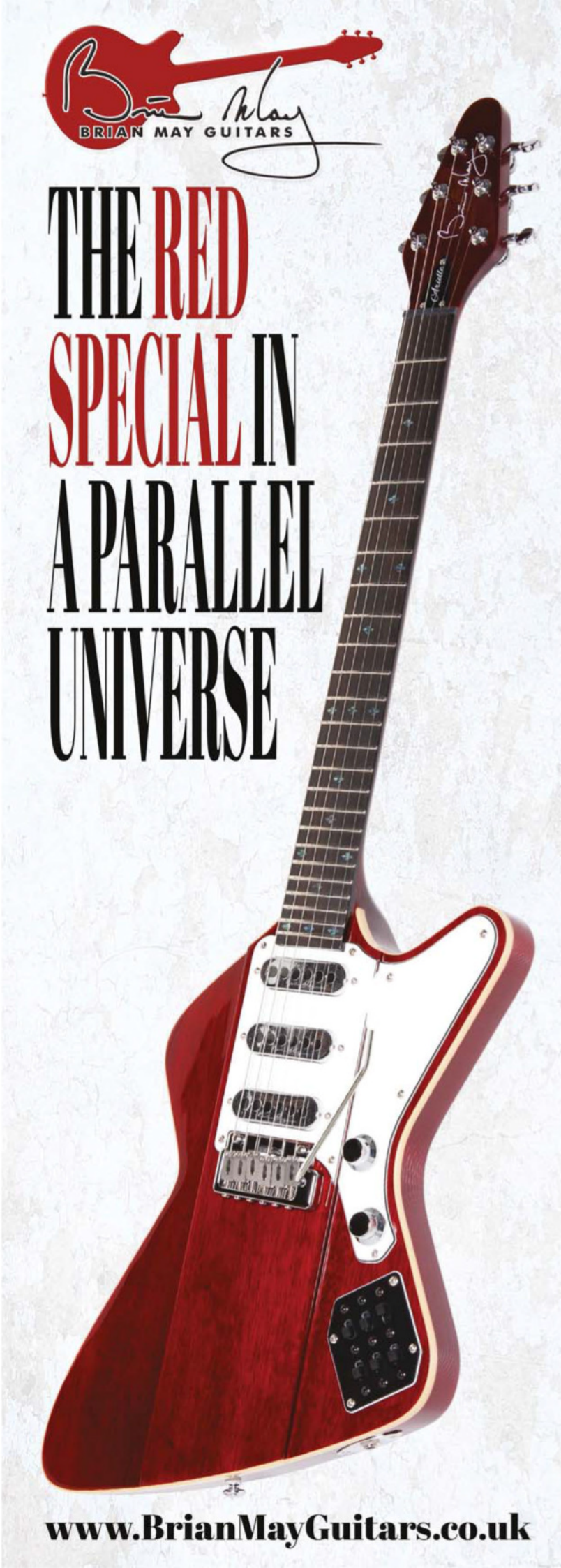
Standout track: *Void*
For fans of: Steve Vai, Paul Gilbert, Jennifer Batten

Richard Hawley
Live At Halifax Piece Hall
Live Here Now (available now)
8/10

Live performance package from Sheffield's finest

Recorded back in September 2021, this album finds Sheffield songsmith Richard Hawley take to the stage with a full band at Halifax's Piece Hall. Released across all formats, including vinyl and CD, there is also an accompanying video of the gig available on both DVD and Blu-ray. The concert finds Hawley in fine form as he storms through a polished set, including tracks from his *Further* album as well as classic songs, made all the more engaging with some excellent atmospheric production. *Standing At The Sky's Edge* is full of menace, with snarling fuzzed-up guitars, while *Down In The Woods* is upbeat and hard hitting. The set includes ballads such as *For Your Lover Give Some Time*, which is augmented with a string ensemble to beautiful effect, as is *There's A Storm Comin'*. Engaging from start to finish! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Alone*
For fans of: Jarvis Cocker, Pulp, Elbow, Paul Weller



THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

With a focus on storytelling and an unexpectedly precious mid-70s Strat, blues-rocker **Aynsley Lister** presents album number eight

Artist: Aynsley Lister

Album: Along For The Ride (Straight Talkin' Records)

Aynlsey's latest album, *Along For The Ride*, was recorded at The Ranch in Southampton

Like any hardened blues musician, it's been a case of relentlessly touring over the years for UK's Aynsley Lister. *Along For The Ride* is his eighth studio album on the Straight Talkin' label that he co-founded with his wife, Stephanie. There are 13 tracks of in-your-face blues rock with everything on 11 and it's certainly one of his finest albums to date. We tracked Aynsley down on the road in Europe to find out the story behind the new recording.

What's your process for writing?

"When I used to write, when I first started out 20-odd years ago, it was very much about the guitar. The guitar was always front and centre, but I think, as I've written more, these days I tend to just focus on the song itself. Obviously, as a guitarist, there's always going to be a bluesy aspect to my guitar playing because that's the foundation of my influences. But I think when I write, I'm trying to create a mood and focus on things like melodies, lyrics and stuff like that. When I used to listen to music, I would listen mainly to the guitar playing. But when I listen to music now I'm listening to the content. What's the song about? Does it take you on a journey that sucks you in? So I suppose I write the stuff I like to hear. I like a song to take me on a journey."

Where does a song start for you?

"I've tried to reverse-engineer this so I can manage it and I still don't know. Some songs start as a lyrical hook, a melody, a piano part, bass or a drum groove. Sometimes I will just sing a melody or a groove into my phone. But it's normally on a guitar. I've only got a couple of acoustic guitars, most of my guitars are electric, so it's normally going to be an electric guitar thing."

The guitar drive tones are great on the album. How do you go about producing that sound when you're recording?

"It's probably an extension of what I do live. I've never been a huge pedal user, I've always preferred the overdrive from an amp. The main amp that I used for the album is my signature [Rift] amp, which is like an EL34 Marshall-esque combo. I have the amp set for a pretty driven tone, and then all the variations in between – from clean to crunches – are off the volume control on the guitar. So even if I'm going for a cleaner sound, then the amp will still be set pretty cooking, I'll just turn the guitar's volume down. That's the sort of thing I've done for years, and it's something I feel the most comfortable with."

Aynsley Lister in story mode: "When I listen to music I'm listening to the content. What's the song about? Does it take you on a journey?"

PHOTO BY ROB BLACKHAM

What were the main instruments that you brought into the studio for the album?

"The main Strat I used was one that I'd had for about a year at the time. It's a '74 Strat, a yellow one with a maple neck. For whatever reason, I went on a hunt for a nice Strat a few years ago and I found this one and it was the best Strat I'd ever picked up. I had a couple of others as well. I had a Custom Shop 60s Strat with a rosewood 'board – pretty standard issue. I've got a handmade LP-type, which is made by Damian Probett, and my old '335' as well, which is also not a Gibson, that's another handmade one. And this old 60s Cello thing that I play slide on. I have no clue what make it is or what year it's from. There are no markings on it. I paid 50 quid for it years ago in a junk shop and it's just got this killer sound for slide. It's got a P-90 in the neck, single volume and tone. I get asked more questions about that guitar than any other guitar I've ever had!"

PHOTO BY ALEXANDRE COESNON

70s Strats have received some bad press over the years. What was it that attracted you to yours?

"I just went looking. I've been wanting an old Strat and I tried a load of 60s ones [and there was] nothing that got me excited. And the one I found just happened to be from the 70s. I'm like, 'Oh, wow, I thought these were shit... I'm gonna buy this.' And then I found another one. I'm like, 'Hang on a minute!' Then it got to this thing where I started laughing like, well, maybe there are some good ones out there. They're not the kind of money that you'd pay for pre-CBS or whatever. I've just ended up having quite a few."

What gauge strings do you typically use on your guitars?

"For a good few years now I've been using Curt Mangan 11 to 52s. I've always tuned down a half step, but those strings work great. I have my action set a little bit higher, but it feels like a set of 10s because it's tuned down. I use the purple Tortex picks, 1.14mm. I can't use picks that have too much flex because I get no control. I've got to use something that's got some substance to it."

Which studio did you use to record the album, and what setup?

"The studio was The Ranch in Southampton and the live room is a converted barn. It was huge. So a really nice big room where you can get everything cranked up. We kind of set up in a circle and the main meat of each track – the bass, drums, rhythm guitars – we tried to get as much of it live as we could. Everyone's looking at each other, vibing off each other, you're in a groove. We added the extra bits later, but the main bulk of each track was done live together."

> "We set up in a circle and recorded the main meat of each track – the bass, drums, rhythm guitars – to get as much of it live as we could"

You're in the middle of touring the new material at the moment. When will we see you in the UK?

"Yeah, I was in Vienna yesterday, now I'm in Hungary and we've got another couple of weeks out here. It's a seven-week mammoth tour of no sleep and lots of shows. Then we come back and we've got another run in March around the UK. We're just going to be touring as much as we can, playing as many places as we can, some festivals, and just getting out there and spreading the word and playing the new stuff live. We've been doing a good chunk of the album in the live show for the past couple of months and it's going really well. The response has been really good so far, which I'm pleased about because you're never quite sure. But yeah, literally just getting out to as many places as possible and just playing for people, really." **[DM]**

After his seven-week "mammoth tour of no sleep and lots of shows" in Europe, Aynsley will be back to it and gigging the UK in March

Aynsley Lister's new album, *Along For The Ride*, is out now on Straight Talkin' Records

www.aynsleylister.co.uk

NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE

Nowt So Strange As Folk

Neville Marten remembers a few of the guitars that went through his hands as a repairer – along with the customers who owned them

As the years go by one inevitably starts thinking back to halcyon days. My memory of the specifics is often dreadful, so I link memories to where I lived, what job I had, or what band I was in at the time. Some of my happiest days were working as a guitar repairer for Selmer/Norlin. When Gibson moved its European operation to Rotterdam I commuted for a couple of years but then that stopped, so Martyn Booth and I set up Don't Fret Guitar Repairs in Gibson's old facilities. We had to build a business but luckily knew lots of local players (including one David Mead) who would bring their guitars for us to mend.

"I veneered the headstock in mahogany and the front in rosewood. It was beautiful and strong. I told the chap it was done, but he never returned"

I still recall some of the stranger jobs we did. One day, a very nice chap brought his old Fender Telecaster along for something very minor. We agreed on a price and I set about the task. The rosewood fingerboard was piled high with gunk, having clearly never been cleaned. The body, too, was thick with sweaty deposits so my first job was to sort this out. It took ages, but as he'd otherwise looked after the guitar very well it came out virtually as new. I can't remember what the job was, but I obviously did it, restrung the guitar, set it up and I have to say I was rather pleased with myself, and couldn't wait to see his face light up.

Come the day, I put the unopened case on my bench and when he walked in slowly revealed the instrument in all its see-through blond glory. He was aghast. "You've changed the strings!" he whimpered.

"They were completely dead and a mismatch of makes and gauges," I proffered. "I couldn't set it up or even tune it properly without changing them. It plays beautifully now." To which he replied: "But a couple of those strings had been on there since new!"

Return To Sender (Or Not)

A couple of times people simply never came back for their guitars. On one occasion someone brought me a beautiful mid-60s Martin D-18. Again, it was a minor repair, but having completed it I did the usual clean-up of the fingerboard and tarnished frets, gave the body a full buff and polish, sorted out the action, called him and said it was done.

It seemed as though about two years went by and one day, having subsequently stored the thing in my attic, I thought to myself, "He's never coming back for that, is he?" So I brought the guitar down, tuned it up and sat playing it for hours. It was gorgeous! Just then, a car pulled up outside, the guy knocked at the door and said, "Is my Martin done?" I said, "Yes, it's right here." I handed it over and he was gone.

Another time, a guy brought me a classical guitar that had received a catastrophic neck break, having been thrown across the room in a fit of pique. It landed on its slotted headstock which promptly broke in two, leaving three stumps sticking out of the neck with the sixth- and first-string tuners, and the remaining three stumps and four tuners on the snapped-off part.

Gluing the stumps back together did not offer a strong enough repair, even though they mated up really well. Instead, I glued them, then veneered the back of the headstock in matching mahogany, and the front in rosewood. It was both beautiful and extremely strong. I refinished the neck, told the chap it was done, but he never returned. Perhaps he was worried he'd do the same thing again.

So that became my house guitar. It had a 'Handmade In Spain' label inside. It was no Ramirez or Contreras, and it wasn't particularly well made, but it sounded lovely. At the time I had a Les Paul Custom, my 'Jimi' Strat, and my ES-335, but the guitar I constantly returned to was 'Old Spanish'. I've no idea what became of it. But I wish I still had it.

Do you have any 'not particularly special' guitars that you've loved, lost and still badly miss? If so, we'd love to hear about them.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WWW.GUITARGUITAR.CO.UK

GAS OF THE MONTH

Classical Gas

What? Yamaha NCX3C Red Cedar
Where seen? www.guitarguitar.co.uk
Price? £799 (RRP £1,140)

I still have a classical guitar, a Yamaha NCX900R. It's really nice, but it isn't particularly loud acoustically, probably due to laminated back and sides, and the fact that it's primarily an electro-classical. But looking around I spotted this. Still a Yammy, but all solid woods; solid walnut back and sides, African mahogany neck and 650mm (25.6-inch) scale ebony fingerboard. Plus it has a gorgeous red cedar top that should help with warmth of tone. It also comes with Yamaha's superb Atmosfeel system, with under-saddle sensor and built-in mic. It does have the standard wide and flat classical style neck, but if that doesn't bother you, it sounds like just the ticket for sofa noodling and a bit of live work (and you can't beat the sound of a nylon-string on a rock ballad – just ask Sting!). It looks lovely, too, with red detailing around the soundhole. GuitarGuitar has one on offer with £341 off (at the time of writing), and if you don't buy it, I just might!

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CONFESSIONS OF A LUTHIER

In Good Company

After a month travelling the country visiting guitar shows, **Alex Bishop** reflects on the vibrant UK lutherie scene

Perhaps it's not entirely unfair to imagine your stereotypical guitar maker as a hermit-like creature, crouched over a gloomily lit workbench among dozens of half-built instruments and forgotten projects: a grumpy rejection of the outside world, wordlessly conversing with wood rather than people. And while there is still plenty of time – for me, at least – to shrink away into full-time seclusion, this past month actually saw me actively engaging in guitar shows and festivals all over the country, travelling well over 1,000 miles to exhibit guitars, meet makers and chat with guitar enthusiasts. It's been a thrill to meet many like-minded luthiers from all corners of the UK; the lutherie scene is fizzing with talented, passionate – and young – individuals.

My first weekend was a double dose of Parisian-cafe-infused jazz courtesy of Shrewsbury Gypsy Jazz Festival, which itself was actually an overnight stop on my longer journey to 'Bute Manouche', on the remote (for a Bristolian) Isle of Bute in Scotland. Niche jazz festivals tend to cater for smaller crowds, but it was a joy to see both festivals sold out, with the enthusiasm of the punters more than making up for the scale of the occasion. For guitarists, the plethora of unusual guitars on show was not short of bewildering. Luthier Jerome Duffell's instruments (https://jeromeduffell.com) demonstrated the versatility of finishes achievable by experimenting with centuries-old French polishing methods, each instrument clearly defined by its own identity with a powerful sound to boot. If you've ever been to a guitar shop but left feeling disappointed by the lack of variety that the bigger brands have on offer, visiting a bespoke luthier such as Jerome would more than satisfy your six-string urges. It was also a joy to meet and chew the fat with more experienced luthiers Steve Toon (www.stevetoon.co.uk) and Jimmy Moon (www.moonguitars.co.uk), guitar builders beneath whose shadows younger folk like myself have to emerge. It's their inspirational work and top-tier craftsmanship that forms the bedrock of the small-'shop guitar-making scene today.

> "If you've ever left a guitar shop disappointed by a lack of variety from bigger brands, visiting a bespoke luthier will satisfy your six-string urges"

From London to the Isle of Bute, Alex has been taking his guitars on the road

PHOTO BY ALEX BISHOP

Creativity Central

Our time in Scotland complete, the next stop was the London International Guitar Show, a diverse exhibition stuffed with guitars running the whole gamut from vintage to contemporary, handmade to factory-built. I drove along to the show with Bristol-based luthier Kris Richmond (www.richmondguitars.com), whose instruments have a traditional appearance but showcase originality under the bonnet. Kris showed me his latest bracing designs, which sought to free up areas of the soundboard with struts tending towards a vertical orientation. He explained that the bracing between his flagship parlour and OM models are fundamentally different, a conscious effort to play to the separate strengths of each body shape.

We were pleased to find ourselves in good company at the show, exhibiting alongside Brendan O'Gorman (www.ogormanguitars.com) whose breathtaking finishing work was a talking point between us luthiers (finishing being a discipline that is difficult to master). Brendan is based in Cornwall and brought with him a standout guitar appointed with shocking-pink veneers and neon-blue purfling, a statement piece that I instantly fell in love with. Not alone in showcasing his originality, here we also met Oliver Marchant (www.marchwoodguitars.com), whose intimidatingly refined craftsmanship I had been pining to see for a long time. Alongside an immaculate Australian Blackwood 00 with a hand-engraved copper rosette, he was showing off a spectacular pear OM with a 'photogram' rosette. It's these kinds of creative touches that make me realise just how valuable lutherie is in drawing upon multiple timeless craft skills to create a single, unified object.

So followed a hectic day at the show talking relentlessly with impassioned and discerning guitarists about wood, tone, music and guitars. Given the challenges facing creatives and craftspeople in these turbulent times, it would perhaps not be surprising to discover there was a drought of UK-based luthiers. Given everything I've seen in these past few weeks though, guitar players have never had it so good. G

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Sweat The Small Stuff

Could your gear be a tweak away from perfection? Paying attention to the details can sometimes help you avoid a big pay out, says **Huw Price**

Not so many years ago, the tone secrets of vintage guitars and amplifiers were closely guarded by a select few. It was an era of mystery, superstition and wonder. Little did we know the internet was coming… It all began with newsgroups and rudimentary chat rooms, and the flow of information soon became a torrent. Schematics of long extinct amps and pedals were unearthed and could be downloaded in mere minutes. The types of tonewoods that great manufacturers once used became common knowledge. Groundbreaking websites, such as GuitarHQ.com, began appearing with paint codes, decent enough photography and breakdowns of features that charted the year by year evolution of most classic guitar models.

This had a profound effect on guitar manufacturing. With better informed customers, the big companies could no longer fob us off with inaccurate features, inauthentic parts and inappropriate finishes. Slowly but surely, then, vintage reissues began to resemble the guitars they were intended to emulate in a meaningful way. And before long, renowned pickup winders were being coaxed out of retirement and company records were dusted off to track down original parts suppliers. Meanwhile, crack teams of razor blade relicers were at the sharp end of the relicing revolution.

But while the big names focused on looks and seductive marketing campaigns, their efforts generally fell short when it came to the pickups. This left a wide-open goal for ambitious pickup manufacturers, who quickly stepped in to make more authentic and often better-sounding replicas than the big brand names and original manufacturers.

Chris Buck was finding his 80s LP replica lacking in his search for "vintage tone Nirvana"

With many of the vintage tone equations now solved, the focus has recently been shifting towards hardware. Vintage tonehounds are discovering that the type of steel used for a Stratocaster vibrato block or the composition of a wraptail's alloy have a noticeable and significant influence on a guitar's tonal characteristics. All of which brings me around to the crux of this article.

Crossing Bridges

Several weeks back, Chris Buck called me because he was convinced that his early 80s Greco Les Paul replica could be improved. No doubt he had driven himself to distraction watching Johan Segeborn's extraordinarily thorough hardware tests on YouTube, and he had been eying up an eye-wateringly expensive ABR-1 replica, complete with unevenly rounded ends and authentic file chatter marks. I felt compelled to ask him, "What exactly are you hoping to achieve here?" "Vintage tone Nirvana, of course", he responded, in a way that made it clear I had asked a daft question. "Fair enough, then", I said. "Bring the guitar over to my place and we can try out a few bridges so you can hear the differences and find out what you actually like."

Over the years, I have acquired a selection of different ABR-1 style bridges, and after a cuppa and a catch up we set about testing. The specs of Chris's Greco are surprisingly close to a genuine 1950s 'Burst and at 9.6lbs, its weight is comfortably within the vintage weight range. The guitar's original bridge had 'SG Bridge' moulded into the underside and, just as Chris had described, the tone was a bit dull and lacklustre. We went straight for the main event, namely the vintage ABR-1 from my 1962 ES-330. This really woke up the guitar with a warm and woody tone, a pleasing frequency balance and plenty of sustain.

An aluminium Faber sounded brighter and demonstrated a livelier and less compressed dynamic response. A Kiss My Strings replica made from vintage-correct Mazak alloy sounded very close to the vintage ABR-1, but I saved the best until last. When I bought my ES-225, ATB Guitars included an old ABR-1-style bridge to tide me over while I repaired the original trapeze tailpiece. The bridge merely has 'Japan' lettering and I had actually been using it on my ES-330 because it sounds slightly better than the original bridge on that guitar. Chris thought so, too, and we had a winner.

Lessons Learned

So, what lessons did we take from this? Well, firstly, I learned that Chris's playing remains depressingly accomplished even when he's lumbered with a bridge that he doesn't like. Secondly, we discovered that the bridge itself exerts a strong influence on tone, even when the guitar is being played through an amplifier. And, thirdly, the obvious front runner at the start of the process was pipped at the bridge post by a far cheaper and less celebrated option.

Huw and Chris put a collection of ABR-1-style bridges to the test – and an unexpected option proved to be the favourite

But there's a broader lesson to take onboard here. Sometimes the guitar or amplifier that you already have may only require an inexpensive tweak or two to make it sound perfect to your ears. All too often we guitarists tend to give up too early and sell things on before we have heard what they're truly capable of doing – often at a considerable loss. A cold rolled steel vibrato block, for instance, may unleash all those upper frequency harmonics that were previously inaudible. A handful of lower-value signal capacitors may tighten up an amp's loose low-end, and some larger value caps may reveal that missing bass. Similarly, an aluminium tune-o-matic can go some way towards counteracting dark humbuckers, and a Mazak bridge can sweeten the treble with bright-sounding PAF replicas while imparting a more vintage tonality on the midrange.

"A cold rolled steel vibrato block, for instance, may unleash all those upper frequency harmonics that were previously inaudible"

Taking an analytical and holistic overview can help us to understand how various component parts interact. This enables us to pinpoint which components are letting our guitar or amp down and target our upgrades accordingly. Nothing beats a new guitar or amp day, but ordering parts and then enjoying big improvements for a relatively small outlay can be similarly satisfying. This applies whether you're shooting for vintage tone or something more contemporary.

As for Chris, he gratefully accepted my offer to lend him my spare vintage Japanese bridge. And while he was driving home I found him an identical one for sale in California on a well-known auction site. It arrived a couple of weeks later and immediately ended up on his ES-335. So I'm still waiting to get my bridge back, but, hey, I guess Chris has been pretty busy lately... G

www.huwpriceguitar.com

PHOTOS BY HUW PRICE

THREE TO GET READY

Quality bridges to enhance your tone

PHOTO COURTESY OF WWW.FABERGUITAR.COM

Faber ABRH €47

Faber has been making fine-quality aftermarket guitar hardware for many years and its no-wire zinc/aluminium ABR-1 style bridges combine vintage mids with a presence lift and lively dynamics. Nickel plating is standard, with plated brass, natural brass, nylon and titanium saddle options. For a little extra you can also choose reliced versions and gold plating. Available in both metric and imperial post spacing.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WWW.KISSMYSTRINGS.DE

KMS Vintage One 50 Zamak €153.78

If your priority is vintage-accurate tone, Kiss My Strings bridges are milled from blocks of the same aluminium/magnesium/copper alloy that Gibson bridges were made from during the 50s and 60s. Available with metric and imperial spacing and with relic options, the kit comes with vintage-correct nickel-plated brass bridge posts and thumb wheels. A sure-fire way to take your Collectors Choice or Murphy Lab to the next level.

'Japan' ABR-1 Copy circa £50

The bridge Chris Buck preferred is the type that were fitted to early Tokai guitars. Since zamak (Mazak) is just a cheap pot metal, it's likely that the original manufacturer – possibly Gotoh – used it, too. The tone certainly suggests so, as does the tendency to sag in the centre, so check those eBay and Reverb pics very carefully. Although made with metric spacing, they do fit USA-made guitars. Just be sure it has 'Made In Japan'/'Japan' on the flip side.

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The Lydian Tonality

Richard Barrett puts the spotlight onto the Lydian mode and how its chords and tonality can pop up to influence the mood

The novel-esque title above may be appropriate in that the Lydian tonality is like a mood or atmosphere you can dive into as and when you please. You may even notice that the opening scenes of many movies feature Lydian chords and melodies in their soundtracks – as does *The Simpsons*' opening theme.

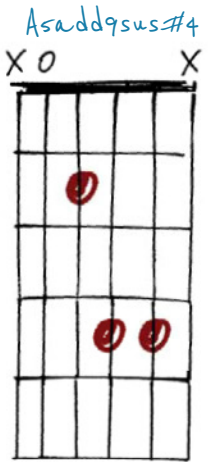
You'll likely have heard of the Lydian mode, but what makes a chord 'Lydian' by nature? To answer that question comprehensively is no simple task, but let's start by reminding ourselves of the Lydian mode in the key of A (to match our chord examples): A B C# D# E F# G# A. In other words, a regular A major scale with a #4 (D#). This single change brings in an element of B major; D# is its major 3rd. Admittedly, this doesn't obviously suggest B major, but if we put a D# in the context of an A major chord, you'll hear it starts to sound like a hybrid between A and B major. This is especially true in Example 2 below, which is actually a B major triad over an A bass note – a chord taken solely from the notes of the Lydian mode.

PHOTO BY KEVIN NIXON/CLASSIC ROCK MAGAZINE

Joe Satriani's *Flying In A Blue Dream* is a really clear example of Lydian chords and single-note lines

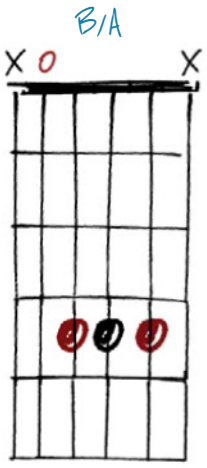
Example 1

This A5 add9 sus#4 is a nice example of what happens when you combine elements of the A Lydian scale into an A major chord. From low to high, we have the root (A), then the 5th (E), the 9th (B) and finally the D#, which is our #4. Remember that these are simply names for sounds – don't let the jargon stand in your way when being creative!



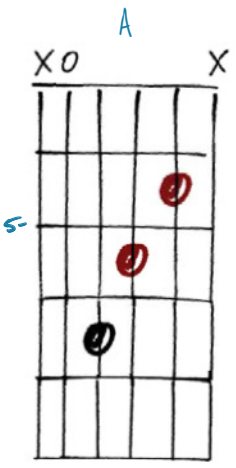
Example 2

We've now moved completely away from the straight A major triad, to a B major triad in fact. However, we are staying with the tradition of naming chords from the 'parent' major scale (A), while acknowledging the altered (Lydian) notes within the name. We could call this A 6th (sus2 #4), but I'm going with B/A.



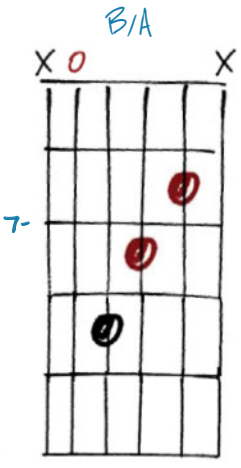
Example 3

This is simply an A major chord in a non-standard position, but if you try playing the A Lydian mode over this it will give you plenty of usable ideas. Ultimately, this will be down to your musical taste, or the mood you want to create, but it is a very nice option to have.



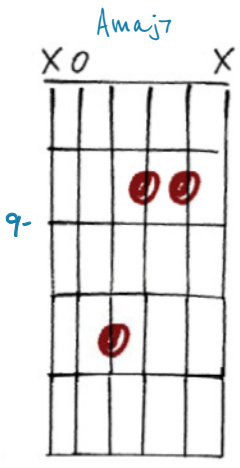
Example 4

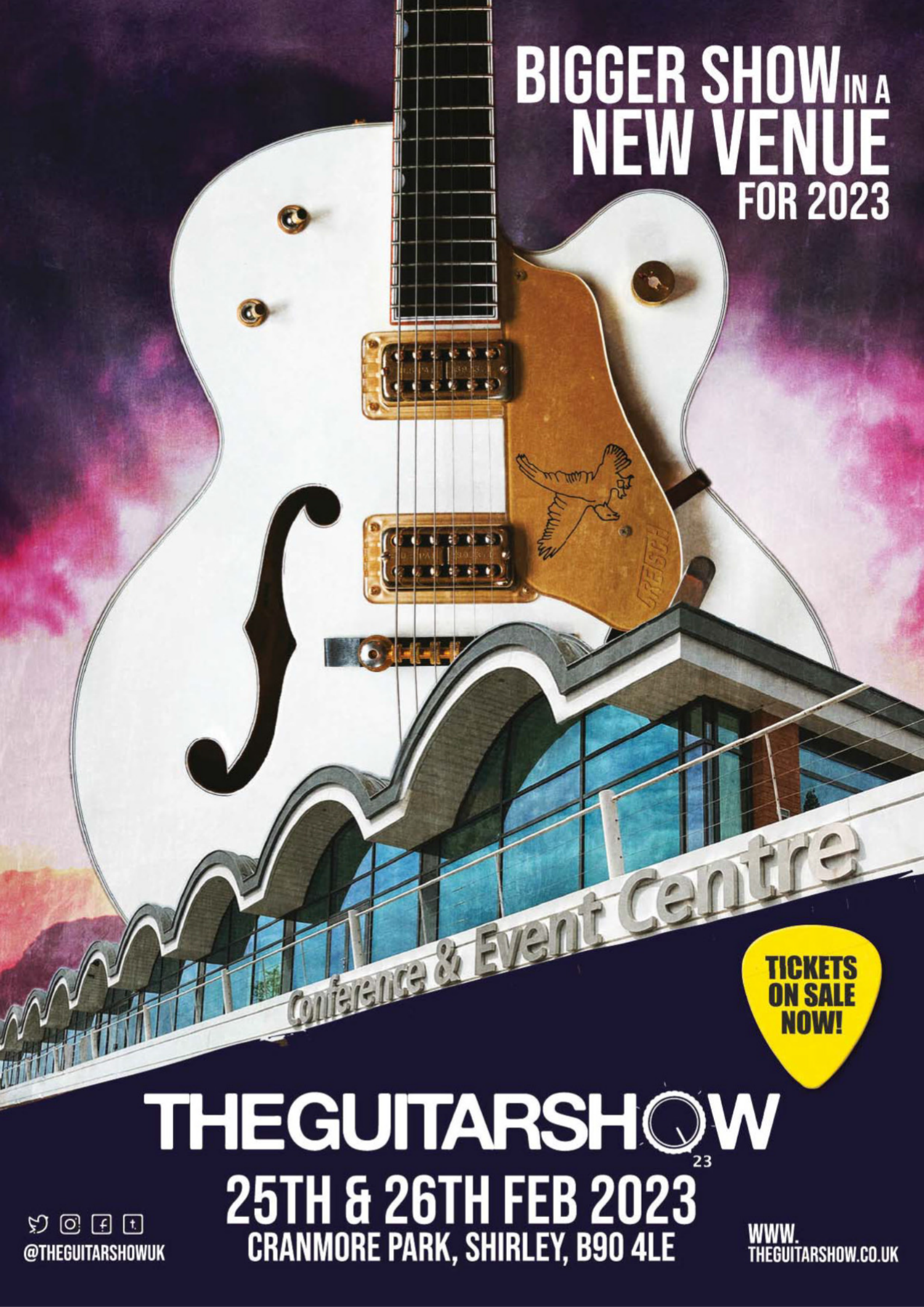
You may see that, as in Example 2, we have a B/A chord – and that surely means playing a B major arpeggio could work over A major to give a Lydian feel, doesn't it? The answer is yes, but remember you haven't actually changed key! You're just emphasising another facet of A major.



Example 5

Like the A major in Example 3, this Amaj7 doesn't suggest Lydian mode in itself. However, Lydian mode will work over it beautifully. I like to view it as superimposing one idea over another, in the way that playing a B major arpeggio over A major works, or a B major triad over an A bass note such as the B/A in Examples 2 and 4. All of these ideas suggest a Lydian feel.

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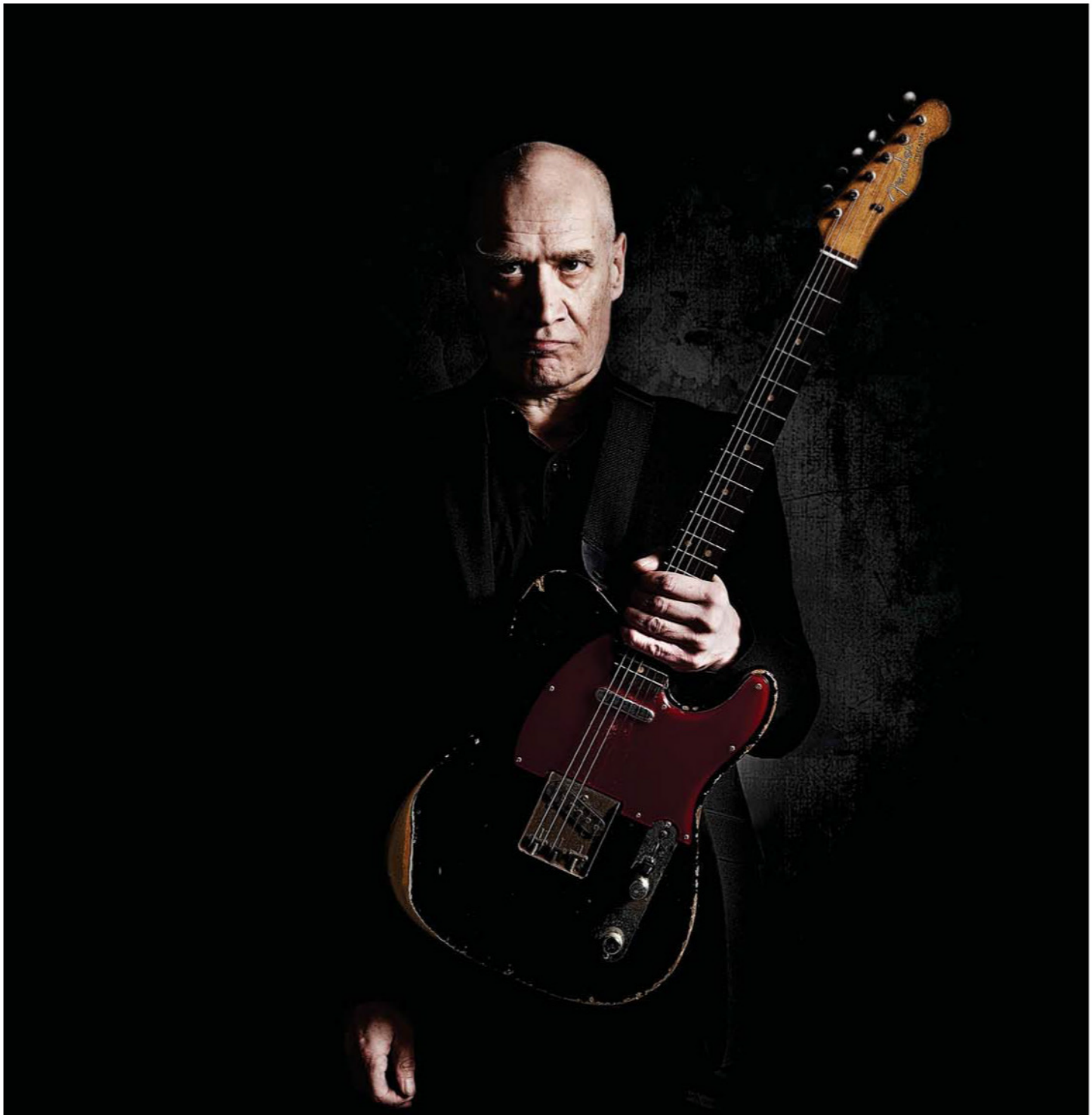


WILKO JOHNSON

1947-2022

The beloved Dr Feelgood guitarist left us on 21 November 2022. We salute the livewire stage presence and piston-pump guitar style that lit the fuse of punk

Words Henry Yates

PHOTOS BY ADAM GASSON

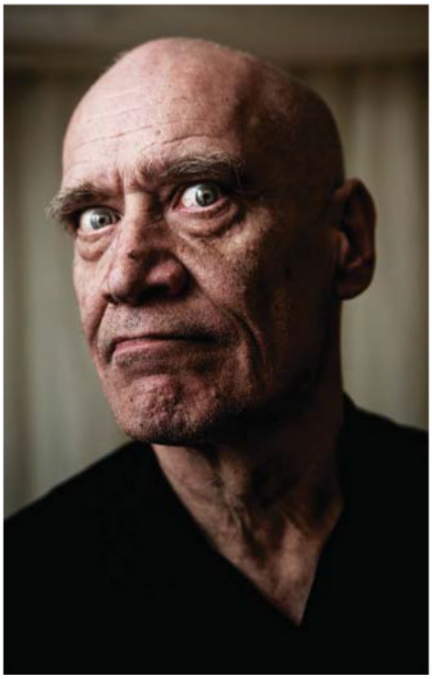
WILKO JOHNSON

July 1947 – November 2022

Jaw clenched and eyes bulging. Skittering across the stage, bolt-upright and belligerent. Shouldering his black and red '62 Tele in the style of a machine gun to mock-strafe the crowd. The sight of Wilko Johnson in full flight – a spectacle so visceral that only the antics of Pete Townshend come close – would have been electrifying at any point in rock 'n' roll history. In the early 70s, when the presiding guitarists of prog stood statue-still and studious, nobody could take their eyes off the late Dr Feelgood guitarist.

"His playing was angry and angular," wrote Billy Bragg after the news broke of Johnson's death on 21 November. "But his presence – twitchy, confrontational, out of control – was something we'd never beheld before in UK pop."

Born John Wilkinson on Canvey Island, Essex, Johnson quickly rejected the path of his gas-fitter father ("a stupid, uneducated and violent person," he said). The imported blues vinyl of Chicago's Chess Records signposted another way – "When I first heard Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley," Johnson told this writer, "it was just so exciting and mysterious" – as did the defining guitar influence of Johnny Kidd And The Pirates' Mick Green.



"[Wilko's] playing was angry and angular. But his presence – twitchy, confrontational, out of control – was something we'd never beheld before in UK pop" **BILLY BRAGG**

By extension, just as Johnson had dubbed his bleakly romantic estuary homeland the 'Thames Delta', so the music he made upon teaming with singer Lee Brilleaux in 1971 to form Dr Feelgood was a chippy, brittle and unapologetically British take on rhythm and blues. "It was so basic," he told *Guitarist*, "but we instantly caught on and were packing the places out because we were just so different from whatever else was happening."

Debut album, *Down By The Jetty* (1975), featuring Johnson's *She Does It Right*, was followed the same year by *Malpractice*, home to his classic *Back In The Night*. But the surprise UK No 1 of 1976's live release, *Stupidity*, confirmed the Feelgoods as a band that thrived on the stage, where Johnson's piston-pump Telecaster technique – known as 'the stab' – was at its most thrilling.

The guitarist dismissed his abilities ("I can play three chords and 12 bars"). Yet his rhythm-lead hybrid was often uncanny, even suggesting a second unseen guitarist, with his robotic right hand also hitting riffs and solos without breaking the up/down groove. Another ingredient was his pickless technique, Johnson instead fanning his fingers like a particularly ferocious flamenco player. It was the result, he reflected, of switching from an early left-handed guitar (his natural preference) to a right-hand Watkins Rapier. "It's such an awkward thing, it's counter-intuitive. It makes you feel freaky. And, in the midst of all this freakiness, holding onto a pick was one job too many."

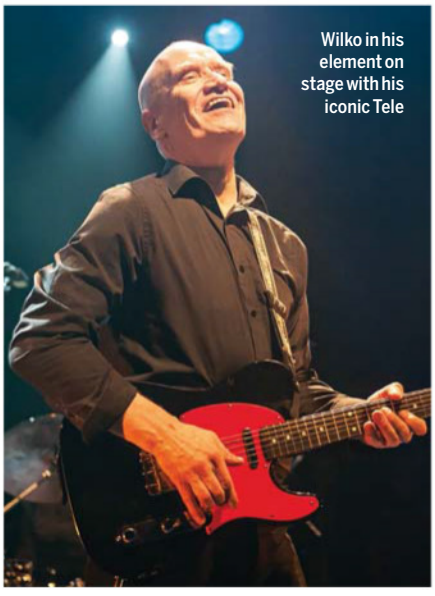
Then there was his signature stunt, most often employed on *Riot In Cell Block No 9*. "We found out that if you're playing rock 'n' roll, whizzing about a bit and holding your guitar like you're shooting a machine gun, then it excites audiences," he reasoned. "That's purely what it was about. The guitar makes a good pretend machine-gun. It's built for that."

Johnson left the Feelgoods in 1977 under something of a cloud, but had already made an impression on the punks. "I was walking down Oxford Street one day and suddenly these three geezers come running up. One of them is Joe Strummer and he said, 'You don't know who I am, but I know who you are! What are you gonna do now?' They were all well into Dr Feelgood."

For the next four decades, the talismanic guitarist would rarely be idle, moving on to Solid Senders, The Blockheads and his own solo band. In 2009, Johnson's profile as a cult national treasure would be boosted considerably by Julien Temple's acclaimed Feelgoods documentary, *Oil City Confidential*.

But perhaps the most heartening aspect of Johnson's story is that his obituary has already been drafted once before. Diagnosed in January 2013 with terminal pancreatic cancer, the guitarist embarked on a farewell tour, before a revised assessment led to an 11th-hour life-saving operation and the removal of a 3kg tumour "the size of a melon".

Johnson didn't waste this unexpected afterlife, swiftly producing his most successful release outside the Feelgoods with 2014's UK No 3 double-header alongside Roger Daltrey, *Going Back Home*. The wider world, it seemed, had finally caught on to what the guitar community had always known. "Wilko is one of those British guitarists that only the Brits make," noted The Who frontman. "He really is a one-off..."



Wilko in his element on stage with his iconic Tele

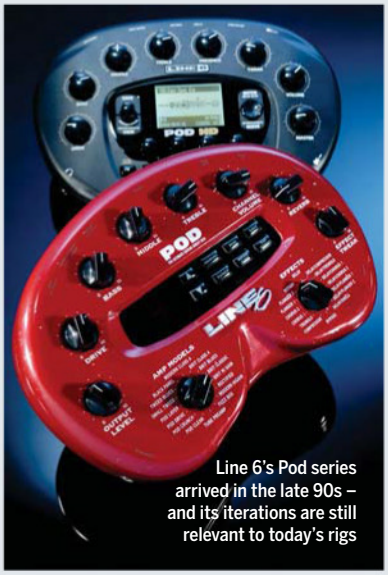
PHOTO BY KEVIN NIXON

Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.
Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

STAR LETTER

OLD GOLD



Line 6's Pod series arrived in the late 90s – and its iterations are still relevant to today's rigs

Times are hard, everything costs a packet and we may not be rushing out to buy new gear quite as quickly as we were. Well, how about digging out your old stuff? I just read about Bill Nelson in the best pedals feature [issue 490] still using a Pod 2.0 and thought, 'I have one of those somewhere!', dug it out, even read the manual, which I never did when I bought it, and I'm spending time realising what an ace bit of kit it actually is. It's got 16 amps I never found before and I'm spending some time carefully getting the best out of it rather than my cursory approach back in 2001 or thereabouts. Having said that, one of the Pod's big selling points was that you didn't need to read the manual to get it going anyway. What's lurking in your cupboards?
Trevor Gronow

Spot on the money, Trevor. We're sure that all of us have some gems stowed away somewhere that once formed valued parts of our collection but have been usurped by newer gear. Asking around the office here there were confessions regarding treasure hoards of redundant gear that have been stowed away out of sight and this included a couple of instances of Pod 2.0 ownership, too. As one of the first 'modelling' amps it was revolutionary when it first came onto the market – a headphone amp that actually sounded like the real thing in the way it could emulate combos, stacks and effects from a whole range of manufacturers. Maybe we'll dig out our 24-year-old model, blow off the dust and give it an audition, too. Meanwhile, please accept a pair of innovative Vox headphones in recognition for reminding us of forgotten treasure.

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Each issue, the Star Letter will win a pair of Vox VGH AC30 guitar amplifier headphones!
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IRON MAN

I empathise with Jamie and his battle with his soldering iron [StewMac Ghost Drive Pedal Kit, issue 493]. With only a bat detector kit-build as my previous experience of fine soldering, I nervously took up an iron and got to work.

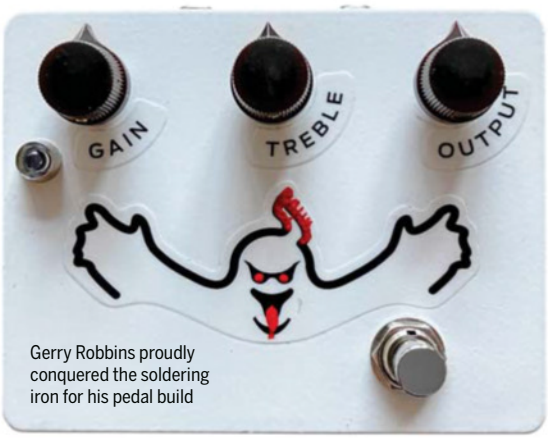
The quality of the parts and instructions do StewMac proud. I, too, found achieving consistent good quality solder joints the main challenge but doable with a little care. The videos and Jamie's comments are really helpful in coaching us less confident folk. I did wince a bit as I plugged in the finished build [pictured below]. Never has a little LED glow meant so much!

The tone may not be a Klon Centaur, but its creaminess sounds great to my ear, to the extent that the little green TS has been evicted from my 'GAS' 'board to make space for the new pedal. Hope you like the red 'highlights'.
Gerry Robbins

Congratulations on finishing your pedal, Gerry – ours is still very much a work in progress. As you say, soldering is a dark art as far as many guitarists are concerned. But we're told that skill in this department is easily acquired and has everything to do with practice. We have stood in amazement and watched seasoned solderers (such as our Mod Squad leader, Dave Burrluck) work with speed, neatness and accuracy, putting our fumbling efforts to shame. Maybe another project or two will see you joining the ranks of that elite.

THE NAME'S BOND...

John Cook was asking for information regarding the Bond Electraglide guitar in issue 492 of *Guitarist* magazine. I noticed that Ben Crowe from Crimson Guitars has acquired one recently for his Dorset Guitar



Gerry Robbins proudly conquered the soldering iron for his pedal build

Museum (https://bit.ly/494feedback_crimson) and he is going to do a YouTube video teardown of it shortly. I am sure he would be able to help as I think he is also in touch with Andrew Bond's son.

There is also some information on rebuilding the electronics in this video posted by Offbeat Instruments (https://bit.ly/494feedback_offbeat). Hope this is of some help.

Phil Handley

We have had a heartwarming response to John's plea for a circuit diagram for his Bond Electraglide and so a big thanks to everyone who got in touch with us with offers of help – with any luck, John is now on the journey of rescuing his guitar's original electronics. We're sure Ben Crowe's and Offbeat Instruments' videos will enrich everyone's knowledge of this fascinating guitar.

SHOCK OF THE NEW I

With regards to the letter you printed from Victor Lewis in your Feedback section of issue 491 titled 'What's New?', I couldn't agree more. How about more photos and articles on some beautiful big-body archtops or hollow bodies? Or maybe even some semi-solids. Just looking at them, especially some of their curly maple backs, and knowing what it takes a skilled luthier to make one is something I enjoy looking at and reading about very much.

Gary Curry

Thanks for sharing your thoughts, Gary. We occasionally feature archtops in our Historic Hardware features or other classic gear related articles, but it's a good idea to focus more upon the jazz boxes of yore. Perhaps something we'll take a longer look at later in the year.

SHOCK OF THE NEW II

You invited comment [issue 491] in response to Victor Lewis bemoaning lack of innovation in guitar design/materials. Having grown up with guitars since the 50s I think their evolution rather than revolution has been key to the continuing romance of guitar ownership, and has been borne out by a healthy market, boosted by great British builders frequently showcased in *Guitarist*. I rest my case!

Eric Laybourne

We make a real effort to stay in step with innovation in the guitar field, featuring as much of it as we can. So many guitars are variations on old favourites and they have their place as their popularity among players never ceases to wane. It's sometimes a difficult tightrope to walk, but we try our best.

Richie Sambora rocking his Ovation double-neck acoustic on the *Slippery When Wet* tour in 1987

DOUBLE TROUBLE

I started a band about five years ago now with a view to getting out and playing more guitar, and playing with other like-minded people. It started as a club in my local pub... which sounds very grand; it was two people at first, but we have grown to five. Three guitars, a bass and a harmonica player who also plays bongos.

We play acoustic guitars doing a mix of favourite covers from Small Faces and The Kinks right through to Harry Styles, and have a growing number of originals in the set also. Anyway, to vary our sound a little from song to song we also include mandolin and 12-string, which means swapping instruments between songs. My question is, then, aside from Ovation, why haven't more manufacturers made a double-neck acoustic?

Dave Leask

It's probably a case of low demand. Even in the electric field there are very few manufacturers that produce double-neck guitars as standard stock models. The other thing would be how a double-neck would be configured: 6/12, 6/6 (to allow two different tunings), or every other variation in between. The answer is custom builders, who will be pleased to make your multi-neck dreams come true, just as luthier Andy Manson did when Led Zeppelin's John Paul Jones requested a triple-neck acoustic.

LIGHT WORK

Regarding David Mead's article on light string tone [issue 491, Gear Of The Year], for people like me bending is a core element of style or technique. We get round it with light strings, or put the acoustic down as an unplayable monster. My Eko Ranger was massively over-engineered – it took Picato 0.009s with no fretbuzz, etc. Dare I state no tonal or audibility qualms, either, just a need to drop the action.

Since those days the nearest anyone's got to an acoustic that responds to light steel strings is the plugged-in bowl back. Acoustic technology has moved on, but my recent acquisitions develop problems that increase with lighter gauges.

We cannot defy physics, but that is precisely why some of us need lighter strings. So what did the Eko have that a guitar umpteen times more costly doesn't?

Alex Oliver

We have to agree that Eko's Ranger VI was built like a brick outhouse, Alex. But light-gauge strings on an acoustic shouldn't present too much of a problem, perhaps it's more a question of setup rather than anything else. Most acoustics these days will likely be set up for a 0.012-gauge string set, but a luthier could probably adjust the truss rod and string saddle height to accommodate lighter strings. Has any reader solved this problem? If so, please let us know.

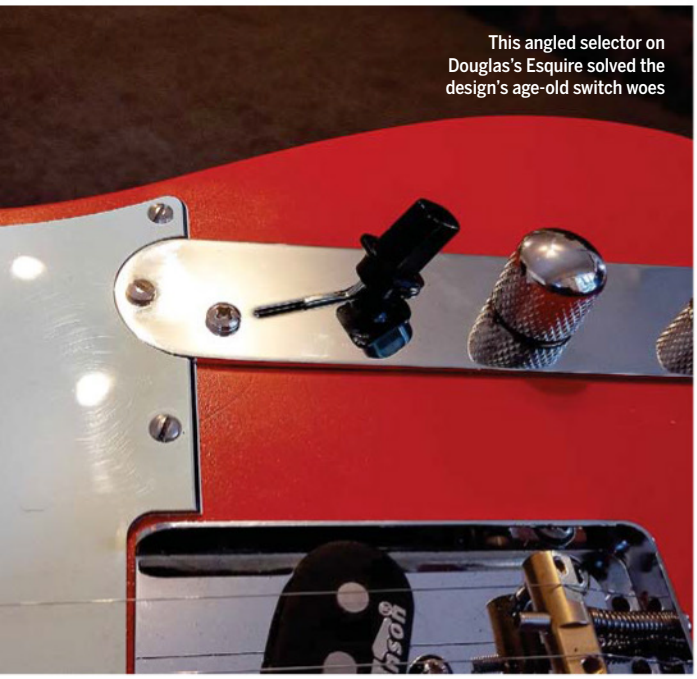
PROPER CHARLIE?

In issue 493, on page 81 in the feature on Charlie Burchill, the photo is of Jim Kerr and Johnny Marr at Mandela Concert 1988.

Jeff Prater

Yes, we were somewhat, ahem, simple minded when we came to caption that particular photograph and realise that it might have marred somewhat the reader experience. Apologies!

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor. Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com



This angled selector on Douglas's Esquire solved the design's age-old switch woes

MAKING THE SWITCH

I refer to the letter from Peter Collister in your previous issue [493] in which the humble Telecaster is criticised for the position of the selector switch. Yes, it is a decades-old design, and has even been repeatedly copied in its inferiority by numerous other manufacturers since the beginning of time. It is clearly the way it must be. However, I came across a company in Germany (Edinger Guitars) that provides a simple solution – one to which your reader refers.

If you have a look at my simple Esquire that I threw together last month [pictured above], the selector is at a slight angle. Problem solved! The bridge is from Trevor Wilkinson, and I have opted for a top-loader option (although I have fitted through-body ferrules.) The pickup is also a Wilkinson, and I must say is an absolute belter. The electrics are an Eldred Esquire mod by Bloodstone GuitarWorks. I have a Bare Knuckle Boot Camp True Grit ready to replace it with, but I am reluctant to at the moment, as the sound is truly epic.

So, don't be swayed by the snake oil and mirrors claims by the major manufacturers who will tell you that their version of a particular pickup will take you to musical places of your dreams, until you try the well-known and less expensive alternatives. This Wilko is an absolute Tele Banger.

Douglas Mummery

Bravo, Douglas. We'd imagine many Tele players are torn between wanting their guitars to look like the decades-old original or indulging in a variation that improves playability. Thanks for the information – and that Esquire looks fabulous. We bet the pickup is every bit as good as you describe it.

Flattley
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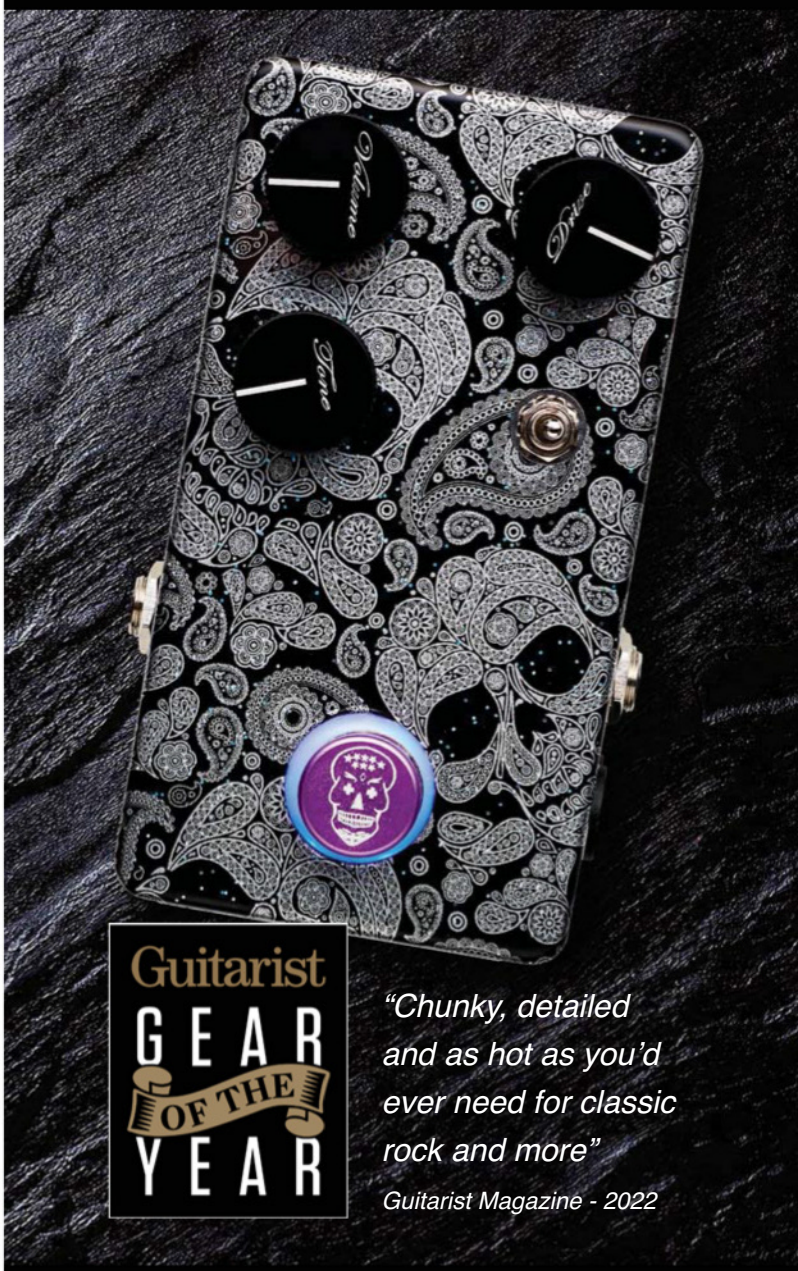

Guitarist GEAR OF THE YEAR

"Chunky, detailed and as hot as you'd ever need for classic rock and more"
Guitarist Magazine - 2022

The award winning Flattley Revolution pedal is one of the many guitar and bass pedals hand built in England by Flattley Boutique Effects Pedals. For more information, demo videos & stockists visit

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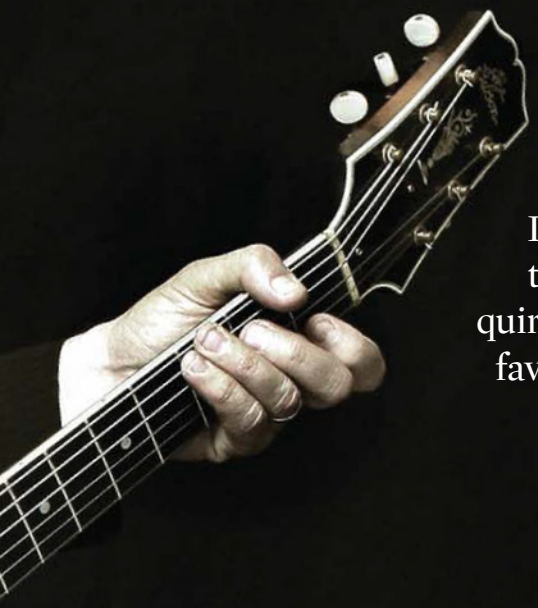
ANDY FAIRWEATHER LOW



Defiantly old-school in his approach to music making, with a delightfully quirky taste in guitars to boot, everybody's favourite sideman has a new solo album, *Flang Dang*, poised for release

Words Jamie Dickson & David Mead

Andy Fairweather Low first stepped into the spotlight and released a solo album 17 years ago. More accustomed to being a sideman to the likes of Roger Waters, Eric Clapton, Van Morrison and George Harrison, he's gone on record in the past declaring that he is more comfortable in that role rather than bandleader. Beginning his career back in the 60s with the band Amen Corner, his solo career in the 70s was a busy one, with albums such as *Spider Jiving* and *La Booga Rooga* achieving cult status among fans.

Now, he's set to release *Flang Dang* in February of this year, although it wasn't something that was planned. Once again, the trials that lockdown and the pandemic brought upon the entertainment world caused Andy to take a look at the demos he had recorded at home – and an offer he couldn't refuse from the owner of Rockfield Studios in Wales, sealed the deal and the new album was brought to life. We delve a little deeper...

What can you tell us about the run-up to your album?

"We did one live-stream gig [in lockdown] from the Hideaway club in Streatham. Then there was nothing. And it went on being nothing month after month after month. Then we got to Christmas time, and I'm speaking to Kingsley Ward, who owns Rockfield Studios. Just a social call, you know: 'How are you coping?' And he said, 'Well, what are you doing?' I said, 'I'm doing nothing,' and he said, 'You should come down to Rockfield. You can have a week for nothing. Just come down, it'd be good to see you.' And I thought about it. It went on for a while. It got to the summer – still Covid, still in lockdown..."

Did you have a store of material ready to record?

"I make my demos at home. I've got a little Boss 1180 machine, a little eight-track recorder, and my recordings are badly recorded, but I love doing it. It reminds me of the old days of making records in the 50s when it was mono and you didn't have this kind of landscape where you could separate a bit to the left and a bit to the right – it was just one beautiful thing.

"The only thing I couldn't stand was using a drum machine. The drum machine used to drive me crazy, but it got me to do the songs. So I thought, 'Well, I love my demos, [but] the quality of them recording-wise, whether it's the voice or the guitar, is not particularly good. It'd be great to get in the studio.' So I asked Paul [Beavis], the drummer with The Low Riders, if he'd come in with me and replicate the drum patterns, and give it a bit more as well, so the perspective would be better and the quality of the sound would be better. He said yes so in we went."

1. Andy first came to light in the band Amen Corner in the 1960s, but he's spent a good part of his career since as a sideman to the likes of Eric Clapton and Roger Waters

2. Renowned for having an eclectic taste in instruments, Andy once took an old Teisco to a gig with Clapton at the Albert Hall, eliciting the response, "What's that? Play a proper guitar!" from EC

There are some lovely old-time shuffles and grooves on the record. Did any records in particular from your collection act as touchstones for the sound and vibe of this record?

"The truth is, you hear a record like *Love & Happiness* [Al Green] or Free with *All Right Now* and you start writing. However, you eventually end up with a song that has got nothing to do with *All Right Now* or *Love And Happiness*, but that's where the fire came from. A friend of mine would send me DVDs every now and again, just to keep me sort of spirited and aware of what's going on – old gospel stuff. There was one song called *Calvary* and it was this black preacher and his wife singing. That inspired me, that version. This guy singing live inspired me to have a go and make a song around that. Never quite managed to reach the heights. But the great thing about great records and great groups is if you aim that high and you fail, you're still not doing that bad when you're below what is absolutely fabulous.

"When I'm in my car, I'm playing Otis Redding, I'm playing T-Bone Walker, I'm playing Jimmy Reed, I'm playing John Lee Hooker or whatever it is... I've not moved on yet. I'm a grumpy old man and whatever's going on today I listen to it, or watch it, and I realise that there's no connection to me. The fact is the people I listened to 50 years ago are still as good. And I'm still as far away from them as I was when I first listened to them. That's how good Ray Charles was, that's how good T-Bone Walker, BB King, Freddie King, Albert King, Wes Montgomery were."

What factors influenced your choice of guitars and amps on the record?

"Tone's very important to me. If you've not got tone, then it's just a waste of time – it's just rambling notes with a scratchy sort of metallic sound. No, forget it. You know, your BB Kings, your Albert Kings, your Freddie Kings... The way it was, you plugged into an amp, whatever state the valves were in, whatever state the wood and the speakers were in, you plug the lead in and that's what it sounded like. Until people decided, 'Let's get the sound a bit better.' No, thank you. I want an inefficient amp and if I could just turn the volume up and that was it, I'd be perfectly happy. Let the guitar and pickup do the rest.

1

PHOTO BY HARRY HERD/WIREIMAGE/GETTYIMAGES

"I'm a grumpy old man and whatever's going on today I listen to it, or watch it, and I realise that there's no connection to me"

"I've got a Knight Arena made by Gordon and Robert Wells. I use that a lot on stage. That's the guitar I use the most. I've got an Airline and it's got one pickup on it and I love it. It's small scale, I've got a 0.065 [gauge string] on the bottom and 0.016 on the top and they're all flat-wound. I love flat-wound strings. I do use round-wound – I've got a Strat with one pickup and I've tried playing it with flat-wounds and it doesn't seem to work.

"What else? Well, my friend Alan Rogan who's not with us any more but a fabulous guy, always said, 'Andy, you need a Telecaster,' and I'm going, 'I don't.' A Telecaster is a man's guitar, y'know? You've got to know what you're doing with a Tele. But Alan spoke to Bill Nash and said, 'You need to make Andy a Telecaster,' and he sent it to me and that's on the album, too.

"I've also got a Supro with a lap-steel pickup and I got Fender to make me an Esquire tuned to A, and that is a beast of a guitar. I tried using that with Eric [Clapton] and he said, 'Put that away! Play a proper guitar.' Then I had a six-pickup Teisco with the bottom three strings into one amp and the top three to another – that was the Japanese idea of stereo. I saw Ry Cooder using one and I said, 'I've got to get one of those.' Alan Rogan was in America and he brought one back for me. I did get to use it once at the Albert Hall, but again it was, 'What's that? Get a proper guitar.' 'Yes, boss.' And all the toys went back in the pram..."

PHOTO BY JOBY SESSIONS

3. Andy says that making Clapton's *From The Cradle* album, with all the musicians in the room together as it would have been in the 50s, was a fabulous experience

You use some interesting effects on this latest album. The lead tone on *Waiting For The Up*, for example, sounds like a heavy fuzz sound...
"A [T-Rex] Quint [Machine] octave pedal. Funnily enough, when we play the song live, I let Nick [Pentelow, sax player] take the solo because it's another pedal and I don't want any more. I've got a wah-wah and an analogue delay; I've tried digital delays, but I don't get on with them. I plug it in and it works. There's no, 'Let's try a bit of this and a bit of that...' Like in the studio, I have no knowledge of what goes on in there. I'll leave that to those that know. I get in and I play and my hope is whoever's there just captures what I'm doing. And luckily, Joe Jones, the engineer on this album – was I lucky to meet him! A youngster. I met a youngster and he was showing me the way. How good is that?"

In terms of production values on your albums, can you explain what it is you like to hear?
"Feel is important. I need to hear the room. I can pick out Al Jackson [Stax session drummer] on any record – and I think that's fairly unique. We're talking about the drummer, I'm not talking about the singer or the guitar player. We're not going, 'That's Freddie King...' or 'That's Albert King' or 'That's BB King', you can pick out those three instantly. But I can pick Al Jackson out. And I can pick him out because of his kit, but I can also pick him out because of the room. Stax had a sound, Muscle Shoals had a sound, and Rockfield's got a sound. And when I went there, speaking to Joe, I said, 'I want to hear the room.' When I play the record I want to go, 'That's Rockfield, that's The Coach House. That's the studio I went to in 1965, albeit not quite in the same form as it is now.' I want to get those early Muddy Waters sounds.

"*Chicago Bound* by Jimmy Rogers was an album that Eric [Clapton] introduced me to. That was Muddy's band, but with Jimmy Rogers and the sound, the room, playing together... The thing about doing that is everything has to be right. There's no, 'Oh, we'll overdub that,' there's none of that. That's the take. The strangest thing about a lot of those records is the take was the take, where all those little interactions, all those in-between licks were perfect from everybody. A bit like recording with Eric on *From The Cradle*. We'd get in at 11 o'clock and start playing whatever song it was, take a break and go back and start playing that song again, waiting for that moment when everything was right. That was a fabulous time, making that album."

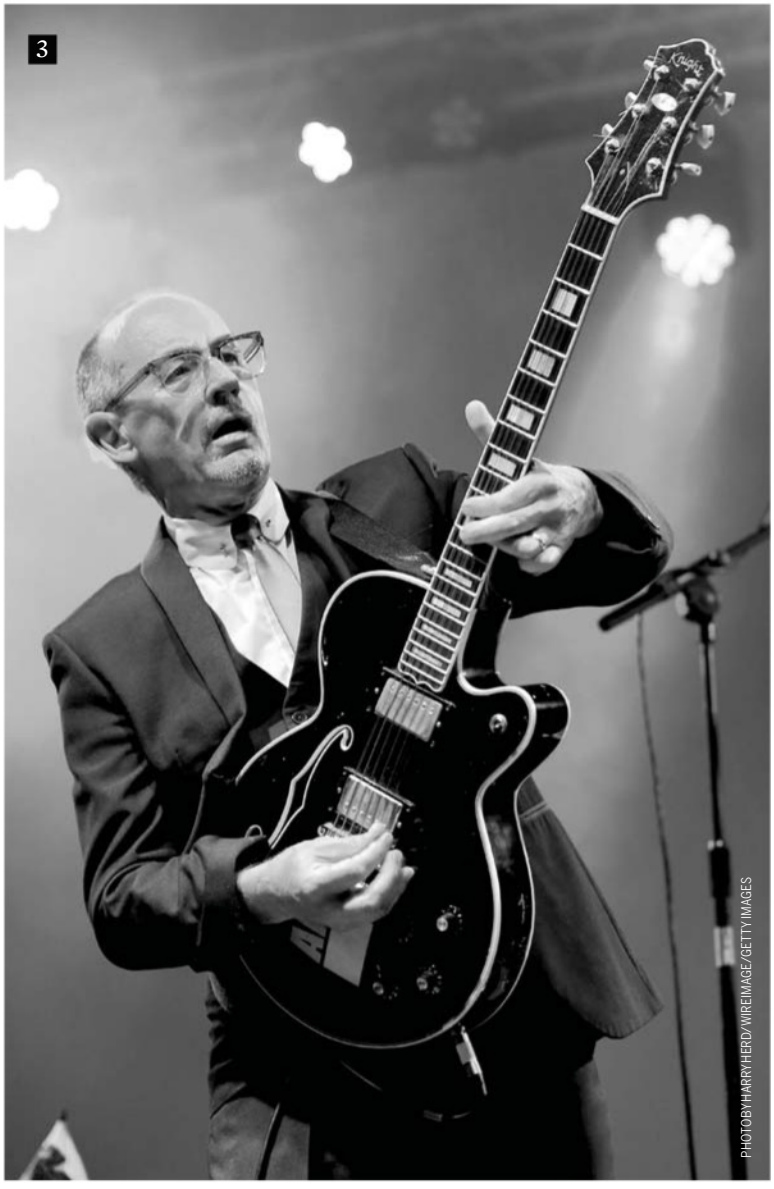


PHOTO BY HARRY HERD/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

> *"I refuse to reignite the Amen Corner franchise. I'm too old to be who I was. This is a period for me to be who I am"*

What are your plans for the record now?
"Yeah, I mean, we've been out playing, we just stopped now. But I've been on the road and I've been playing three or four tracks on the album. What I love is that they're great live. These songs, certainly *Dark Of The Midnight*, *Got Me A Party*, *99 Ways*, they're now part of the catalogue and we'll definitely be playing them live. My franchise is not that big, but I'm doing all right, and we'll be back out playing in front of people. It amazes me. We go to a gig and there's people there. I've had my time a few times and they're there. They might have come in for a bit of *[(If Paradise Is)] Half As Nice* or they might have come in for a bit of *Wide Eyed And Legless* and a few others, but there's a lot of guitar in there and there's a lot of blues, there's a lot of skiffle. I refuse to reignite the Amen Corner franchise. I get invited to be a guest on shows and they want me to be who I was and I'm too old to be who I was. This is a period for me to be who I am." G

Andy Fairweather Low's new solo album, *Flang Dang*, is released on 24 February on The Last Music Company
www.andyfairweatherlow.com

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TELE VISION

Seven decades on from its launch, and counting, the Tele is still the guitar for all seasons. When it was conceived it was a design of startling modernity. Today, it's as familiar as our own hands, as much a part of the landscape of guitar as weathered driftwood on a beach. More importantly still, the Telecaster was, and is, a guitar of the people – the workhorse of bar-rooms and clubs across America and then the world. Both country and blues music can claim the Tele as their own and its acerbic growl can be heard throughout rock. The Tele's neck pickup, meanwhile, gave it an elegant jazz voice, too, in the hands of players such as Ed Bickert and Julian Lage – something the Strat could never aspire to. Somehow the very simplicity and unassuming nature of the Tele means it has woven itself into the lives of ordinary (and extraordinary) musicians as few other guitars have, outside of the Martin Dreadnought. In the following pages we examine why the Telecaster's magic is still strong and explore some of the most unique examples of the Tele ever made.

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Olly Curtis

TELECASTER TALES

During a visit to Long Island's Well Strung Guitars, we discovered four rare examples of the Telecaster/Esquire family that prove not only how adaptable Leo's classic single-cut is but how deeply it is ingrained in the lives of musicians and their families down the generations

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Olly Curtis

Ask a guitarist what electric they'd choose if they could only have one guitar to cover all gigs and there's a fair chance that they'll say 'Telecaster'. It's ironic that the simplest of Leo Fender's solidbody electrics has also proven to be the most adaptable. Though if we trace its evolution back a little further to the Broadcaster and Esquire that preceded it, we discover that it became simple by design – because in some ways the earliest prototype guitars were more complex than the classic Tele we know today.

The Tele began life as an entirely new kind of guitar, built for the working musician of the jet-age. But as the 50s progressed, it embedded itself in the musical life of America and the Telecaster became something more meaningful – it was the kind of guitar that went places and got heard at country fairs and city bars alike, a clear-voiced presence in the collective memory of a generation. Thus Telecasters became truly a guitar of the working musician. And when those musicians passed on, their families often kept their guitars and, with time, those instruments and the stories behind them proved to be more remarkable than anyone had guessed.

Regular readers will already be familiar with the treasure-house of guitar heritage that is Well Strung Guitars of Farmingdale, New York (covered recently in our Holy Grails feature in issue 489). Now, as we celebrate the musical legacy of the Telecaster, we return there to examine four guitars and the human stories – and occasional unsolved mystery – behind the most enduring electric of all. Our guide is veteran guitar trader David Davidson, who recounts how Tele history is also *our* history – the story of music-makers, innovators and six-string dreams made real...

The Telecaster's history is also our history – the story of music-makers, innovators and six-string dreams made real...

1. When this guitar appeared in the 1950 Fender catalogue, it featured a headstock decal. But this was deemed to be studio trickery: the logo was, in fact, an artist's rendering and in reality the headstock was plain, as here

FENDER 'LAMP SWITCH' ESQUIRE PROTOTYPE c.1949

Sometimes the least obtrusive guitars hold the richest history. And, at first glance, it might only be an odd detail or two that tips off their importance to the casual observer. Such is the case with a Black Esquire that resides at Well Strung Guitars, which features an unusual pickup-selector switch borrowed from a desk lamp.

The fact it lacks what we would recognise today as a 'proper' three-way switch is a telltale that this is a very early prototype of the Esquire, which appeared in the earliest Fender brochure promoting Leo Fender's revolutionary new solidbody design. David Davidson picks up the story.

"I was very fortunate to get that guitar," David recalls. "I had known about it because the original owner's son contacted me about the guitar. The original owner

"It didn't occur to me, at first, that this was the guitar that Leo Fender photographed with his own camera for the 1950 brochure" DAVID DAVIDSON

had worked for Fender and was gifted this guitar – they basically told him to take it home. So it was never purchased. And they had the guitar in the family until they felt that the time was right to sell it. It took maybe three years for me to buy it. I had been back and forth dozens of times in email or phone communications until I was able to finally meet with the seller.

"Basically, I was going out to California for the NAMM Show several years ago, I think it was maybe 2017, and I said, 'Listen, I'm going to be in California...' So I sent him and his wife a ticket and they came down and met me in my hotel. When I saw the case, I kind of flipped out a little bit, because it was a rare tweed 'thermometer' case [used for very early Fenders] and this one was pretty new, condition-wise. Prior to meeting me, we did all of this back-and-forth without me ever really seeing a clear picture of the guitar – I had one black-and-white out-of-focus kind of picture of it that was sent early on... But when I saw the case I thought, 'Wow, this could be pretty amazing.'

"When I saw the guitar it didn't occur to me, at first, that this was the actual guitar that Leo Fender photographed with his own camera for the 1950 brochure. And the reason why it took me a little bit to figure it out was that, in the brochure, the word 'Fender' was added on the headstock later. It was a studio trick – there was never a decal on the guitar itself. So in the original brochure, they had [overlaid] an artist's rendering of the word Fender on the headstock – too large – whereas the actual guitar has no logo at all."

2

2. This model is likely to be the third of the Esquire prototypes. Its 'lunch tray' scratchplate is made from a fibreglass cafeteria tray and was the first to be shaped in the traditional Esquire/Tele way. Its predecessors' 'plates covered only the treble side of the guitar

While it took further cross-checks to determine the guitar was the same one Leo photographed for the 1950 brochure, even at first inspection it was clear the instrument was very early and a prototype.

"When I opened it, I was able to look at a lot of the DNA – early Fender stuff, the bridge looked hand-tooled, like it had been bent over an anvil and pounded out with a hammer. Also the pots were so early, 1949, and the lamp button was literally something you might have picked up at a hardware store. The control cavity is actually shorter than a standard production Telecaster. Because it doesn't have the three-way switch, they were able to actually make it smaller... And then obviously there's no neck date, which would be consistent with that time period."

David adds that prototype Esquires and Broadcasters show evidence that Leo considered multiple-piece bodies for both models, though he later simplified this vision.

'The guitar also had a 'pancake' body, which they were using for almost all test mules of that time," David explains. "I also have the Broadcaster 0009 [prototype] here at Well Strung Guitars, and that also features a pancake body, but that one is pine whereas the black guitar is actually an ash body. So I think it's eight separate pieces of wood that are joined together to form it. It's pretty cool."

An obvious question is where this particular instrument stands in the series of known prototypes that Leo built before going into production with the Esquires and Broadcasters we recognise today. The Esquire's unique features help place it within a rough chronology, David says.

"The guitar had a 'pancake' body, which they were using for almost all test mules of that time. It's eight separate pieces of wood" DAVID DAVIDSON

"I would say this could be either number two or number three along the line," David argues. "Obviously, the 'Snakehead' is the first guitar. And I've had a pine body Esquire at one time, which is owned now by a famous celebrity, which had a control panel that is perpendicular to the body and made in the Precision Bass style, with the kind of sharp-angled control plate and no [pickup selector] switch; it just had a volume and a tone. And then, after that, this is – I think – the third. Because after this one all the routs for the control plate go to full size, even our 0009 Broadcaster has a full size rout. So I'd say that this is probably the third experimental piece."

David adds that prototype guitars of this kind often featured materials and parts cannibalised from other industries due to the provisional nature of their early design.

"One extra other thing is that it has a 'lunch tray' pickguard. They had the shape in mind of what they wanted for a pickguard. But they didn't know exactly what they were going to use for material. So this guitar and the 0009 Broadcaster both feature what are known as 'lunch tray' pickguards, meaning they were cut out of the bottom of fibreglass cafeteria trays. The pickguards are [attached] with four screws on both this guitar and on the 0009 Broadcaster, but this guitar would be the first one that has a traditional Esquire/Tele-shaped pickguard. The two prior [prototypes] have smaller pickguards that only cover the treble side of the guitar, as you'll see on the 'Snakehead'. So I feel that this guitar is probably the first guitar to feature a full-sized pickguard, just with one less screw. It's a pretty amazing piece."

3. The 'lamp switch' shown here is a clear sign that this is a very early Esquire prototype. The lack of a 'proper' three-way switch also allows for a shorter control cavity

4

4. This 1958 model features a butterfly-type string tree with the 'Spaghetti' logo residing above it, rather than below, a move that happened mid-'56

5. Musician sisters Esther and Bertha Friedlich visited Fender in the late 50s and fell for a factory fresh pair of sunburst Teles that became their own, this model here and its left-handed partner

1958 'CONTOUR' TELECASTER

Just as the 'Lamp Switch' Esquire prototype lay hidden from view for many decades, so have other unique Telecasters of historic significance. But sometimes the guitar itself – no matter how rare – is less striking than the human story connected to it. Such was the case with a unique three-colour sunburst 1958 Telecaster and its left-handed companion that both reside at Well Strung Guitars. While highly rare itself, the left-hander is less remarkable than the other guitar, which features factory-fitted forearm and belly carves, like a Strat.

David explains that the story of this unique guitar could be traced back to a minor incident at Fender in the late 50s when George Fullerton was called upon to settle a kerfuffle caused by two visiting musicians. Little did David know that the story would eventually pull him into its orbit, many years later.

"Those guitars belonged to two sisters – they were called the Friedlich sisters and they had a musical singing group called the Tweedle Dees," David recalls. "Esther Friedlich was the left-handed twin and, eventually, I bought the left-handed Tele from her hands. Meanwhile, her sister, Bertha, was a heavyset girl. And

they went to visit Fender back in the late 50s, where they saw the brand-new three-tone sunburst Telecaster Fender was offering and fell in love. But Bertha complained that the guitar was too heavy and cut into her bosom, and George Fullerton was alerted to the situation because she was acting a little 'prima donna'. So he went in and said that he could solve it and had the guitar ordered for her [with Strat-style contours built in]. They received the guitars a few months later."

The sisters went the way of so many 50s acts, their music fading into history and their lives folded into the fabric of ordinary American life. But they never forgot the guitars they bought from Fender on special order. One day, as recounted above, Esther decided to sell hers – and it wasn't too long before David got word of it.

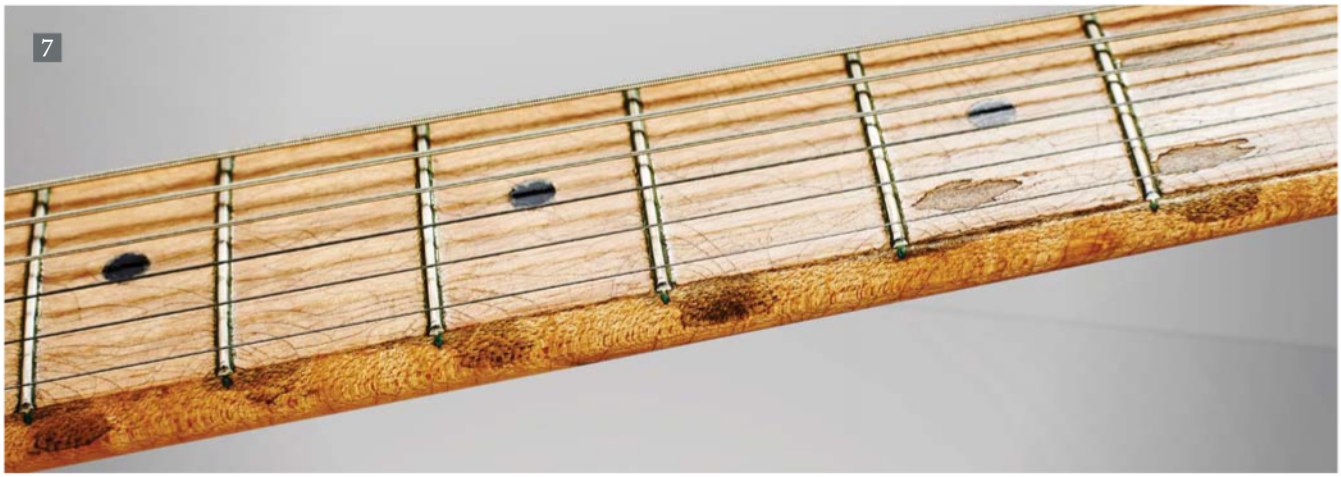
"I flew to Clinton, Iowa, and I went to her house and she was just a little frail old lady and she was sweet as pie... but I saw the case and I thought, 'Holy moly' because it looked brand-new. I opened it up and it was a brand-new left-handed '58 Telecaster and she proceeds to tell me the whole story of her sister. But she doesn't tell me anything about the contours on Bertha's guitar – that was just left out or forgotten. So I said, 'Where's your sister's guitar?' And she said, 'Well, my niece Anne has it now and she's not selling. That's the only thing that she's got of her mother's and it's not for sale.'

6. Much like its left-handed counterpart, this instrument was in a fine condition when David finally persuaded Bertha's daughter let him see the guitar in person

7. The fingerboard wear tells part of a story its caretakers were scared to lose. But in the Songbirds Museum and now these pages, the tale of Bertha Friedlich's Tele remains alive

"I said, 'Okay, but do you think that maybe I might be able to get a picture of the two guitars together, if I can't get the guitar?' She says, 'Well, I'll give her a call,' and she goes to the phone hanging on the wall and calls her niece. I get on the phone and I said, 'Where are you?' and she said, 'Outside of Boulder, Colorado.' So now I'm thinking, 'Okay, I can probably be there in the morning, find a flight somehow... probably have to jump on a couple of little planes to get there.' My American Express card was catching fire, you know? And reluctantly she says to me, 'Okay, I'll let you photograph the guitar,' but she warned me, 'Do *not* ask me to sell this guitar. It's just not for sale.' 'No problem, I totally get it,' I said."

Unsure what reception he'd get but unable to resist the chance to see a totally unique factory Fender from the late 50s, David headed to Colorado.



8

"So I fly down there and when I get to the house, you could just tell she was like the 'cat lady' of the neighbourhood," David recalls. "The house was just crammed with junk everywhere. But on the dining room table was this case. And I said, 'Wow, is this it?' And she says, 'Yeah, this is it.' She opens it up and I look at it and I'm like, 'What's missing here?' Because I only saw the arm-cut at first. So I said, 'Is it okay if I touch it?' She says 'Yeah.' I pick it up and I see the belly cut. And now I'm like, '*What?*' And she's like, 'Yeah, I know, you're looking at it because it's different.' And I said, 'Yes.' I had taken the other guitar with me and so I put them both on the couch and I took some pictures. It was all very nice, but, you know, she was cranky the whole damn time. She kinda wanted me out of there and I tried not to stay too long. And I left without the guitar – didn't even try. I was afraid of her, honestly!"

"The Friedlich sisters fell in love with the three-tone sunburst Teles, but Bertha complained the guitar cut into her bosom…" DAVID DAVIDSON

After the visit, David stayed in touch with Bertha Friedlich's daughter, Anne. He didn't think she'd ever part with the guitar, but he left the door ajar just the same.

"I sent her a Christmas card that year, but I didn't hear anything," David recalls. "The next year I'm at my desk and I'm going through things and it was right around the same time of year and I said, 'You know, I'm gonna write this lady a Christmas card again.' And I wrote the same thing as the year before: 'Hope all is well, just thinking of you – don't forget, if you change your mind, call me last...' This has always been my signature when trying to buy a guitar over a long period of time. Basically saying, get all your offers and 'Call me last'. And I hear nothing. And I keep telling Richie [Friedman, David's business partner at that time], 'It's never going to happen,' because I showed him the pictures and he's going, 'Oh my God, how did you *leave* that guitar?' But I'm like, 'It was never going to happen – she would have beaten me with a broom.'

8. The Strat-style belly cut pictured here was specially ordered by George Fullerton to ease Bertha Friedlich's playing discomfort

"So the next year comes, I send her another Christmas card. Sometime that following January, a little after Christmas, my cell phone goes and I see a '303' area code. I thought, '303? Who do I know in Colorado...' And then I knew and I felt it right here [touches his chest]. I answered the phone and said, 'Hello, Anne.' She kind of giggles, which was the only laugh I ever got out of her, and she says, 'Well, before you start talking, I want to understand something: you're a guitar dealer, right?' I said, 'Yes.' So she says, 'Well, so if I was to sell you this guitar that belonged to my mother, you would have it, and you would sell it, and you would make some money, which is all fine. But the whole story of my mother and my aunt would just fade away forever.' I said, 'Well, unfortunately, probably.'

"She says, 'That's the tough part, for me. I see your Christmas cards every year and I get it. You want the guitar. But how do I deal with the fact that it's really the only thing that I've got left of her, and that story is gonna go away?'

"Talking to her all of a sudden this lightbulb goes off in my head. I felt like a dope. I said, 'Well, Anne, let me tell you something. I'm in the middle of building this museum in Tennessee with some friends. There's not going to be another thing like it. What if I told you that I'd put your mom's guitar and your aunt's guitar side by side in a special room called The Vault and every single person who saw that guitar would hear that story from me – the story of your mother and your Aunt Esther, and their trip to Santa Ana. And the fact that the guitar didn't fit her and they made it right for her. I will train every employee who's there when I'm not there to tell that story, in the exact words. I'll record it and they'll read it word for word. What if I tell you that I will do that for you? Will you sell me the guitar?' She said, 'Go get a plane ticket.'

"So I got on a plane. I was delayed for hours because it was

January and it was snowing, but I flew out to Boulder, Colorado, and I went to her house. She asked me to tell her the story about the museum again. I had a knapsack full of cash with me – I was prepared to spend a lot of money – so she says, 'Well, now we've got to get down to brass tacks.' Because I could see she needed the money. 'How much do you want for the guitar?' I said. She said, 'You're gonna put it in a museum?' I said, 'Yeah.' She said, 'Take the guitar.' She wouldn't take a penny. Which broke me down. Still does. And I did what I said I was gonna do."

So the guitars, and the story of the sisters who played them and their eventful visit to Fender in 1958, were given pride of place at the Songbirds Museum, where we saw them when *Guitarist* visited back in 2018. Sadly, a slump in visitors during the pandemic forced the museum to make difficult decisions about its future and Songbirds subsequently refocused on general music history, with fewer guitars on show, and in due course the Teles returned to David along with others he had provided for display.

"I called Anne because I wanted to give the guitar back," David recalls, in postscript. "But the number was disconnected. I figured she'd lost the house, but I did some digging and found that she'd passed away."

9. The set of three Buck Owens Teles are said to feature Fender's first ever maple caps, which helps to date the guitars as '63 to '64

10. Note the rough texture seen on the headstock face. This finish was thought to be made from a crushed glass and epoxy resin combo

And there the story ended. Though perhaps not quite – because now it has been told in the pages of *Guitarist*, too.

"I figure that at some point when I sell it I'll put the money where it belongs," David reflects. "Maybe an Arts association or something. I don't really know; I don't really have a concrete plan, but I don't know if I could really profit off it," he concludes.

1964 'SPARKLE' TELECASTER

Sometimes, even guitars we've never touched can still play a significant role in our lives. This is the story of the next Telecaster we examine, a 1964 model clad in an unusually rough-textured silver-sparkle finish on both body and headstock, now yellowed with age. The guitar was one of three made in honour of country

music and TV star Buck Owens and his band The Buckaroos. One was presented to Buck, the second to his guitarist Don Rich, who died tragically young in 1974, while a third was presented to Fender's George Fullerton. While this particular Tele is not the one presented to Buck himself, nor that used by Don Rich, it powerfully evokes their memory. For Nashville legend and Tele aficionado Vince Gill, that connection was profoundly moving, David explains.

"Vince Gill said that [Don Rich] guitar was one of the most moving, inspirational guitars in the world – it made him wanna play" DAVID DAVIDSON

"Three instruments were made in this crushed-glass, silver-sparkle finish with matching headstock," David Davidson says. "There's a load of YouTube videos showing Don Rich playing his – and from what I can see it looks exactly like this one here. The Buck Owens one is owned by Buck's family. The Don Rich one had a replaced neck at some point and I believe that it's now in the Musicians Hall Of Fame in Nashville. So this guitar is most likely the George Fullerton one, although it was sold to me years ago under the guise that it was the Don Rich one – it doesn't matter, it's one of the three.

"Fender never attempted to do a crushed glass finish again," David says of the rough-textured sparkle, which has an almost sandpaper-like feel. "This is not a Dennis Swiden-style sparkle finish," he adds, referring to the celebrated custom-finish artist who worked with Fender in the 60s. "This is something completely different. The method of manufacture and how they actually did it has never really been publicised in any way.

11. The crushed-glass finish is unique to just three guitars of this kind, made to celebrate country bandleader Buck Owens and his band The Buckaroos

11

To me, it looks like some kind of crushed-glass finish, tumbled to remove sharp edges and mixed with some type of epoxy resin that coats the guitar. There's a clear-coat painted over it that is nitrocellulose, which has turned yellow with age and makes the guitar look gold. They were also reportedly the first maple-cap guitars that Fender ever made so [a build date of around] '63 or '64 makes sense," David reflects.

The reason this guitar had such an emotional impact on Vince Gill had, once again, to do with family roots and the power of nostalgia for music, people and places of the past.

"When I brought that guitar to Vince Gill's house, Vince told me a story that when he was a little boy and his whole family were musicians, his dad was [performing at] a high school reunion and they were all gonna do this *Hee Haw* skit [based on the popular American TV variety show that Buck Owens appeared in]. And they were going to be Buck Owens and Don Rich and everything else. Vince said 'Oh, I can be in it, can I be in it, daddy?' And he told him yes. He said, 'What do you want to do?' And he said, 'Well, I want to play *Chaparral*. I want to be a Buckaroo, I want to be Don Rich.'

"He said that guitar was one of the most moving, inspirational guitars in the world to him – it made him wanna play. He got the chance to play this guitar at his house when I brought it to him, though I told him at the time, 'I don't really know if this was specifically Don's guitar or not because there's a lot of speculation about it to this day.' But Vince is an unbelievable person. He's the salt of the Earth, the nicest human being. He's just such a regular guy. He was so touched to have a chance to handle that guitar, even knowing that it might not be the one used by his childhood hero. To him, it was close enough. He says he held that guitar and he felt like he was there."

12. The striking pinkish scratchplate was made from a roll of plastic that was heated for shaping. Note the number of screws, which increased from '68 to combat the material's propensity to curl

13. Initially launched in 1968 in either a natural ash or mahogany finish, Thinline Teles soon joined the 'crazy' colour trend of the automotive world

1971 THINLINE TELECASTER

One of the more vivid splashes of colour on the walls of Well Strung Guitars is this guitar, a rare 1971 Thinline Tele in special livery designed for display at the NAMM Show. It belonged to a small run of special Thinlines produced for promotional purposes in a spectrum of bold, optimistic colours. Some of the hues these Thinlines were painted in were named and documented on an accompanying colour chart in Freddie Tavares' own hand. But this one was not listed, making it rarer still.

"We call that guitar's colour 'Ocean Turquoise' [as a deliberate approximation] because we don't know what to call it. I've got several 'Ocean Turquoise' guitars here, but this is a richer, darker, meatier colour than those. And it's not on this chart. But I think that's part of the story: there's this turquoise or teal colour that I think is just an undocumented colour."

Not only is the rich metallic turquoise of the finish striking but also the guitar's pearloid scratchplate, which is a vibrant pinkish-purple colour.

"The tint was put in [to the plastic] in the molten state.

All of those Fender pickguards and Gibson pickguards... the material came in a giant roll, which was heated and flattened," David says. "That's why if you ever look at Fender pickguards, what are they always doing? Curling. Because they want to go back [to their original rolled form].

"There's one thing you notice about Thinline Telecasters: they started in 1968 with an 11-hole pickguard. But by 1971, some of them have 15 holes or even 17 holes because this pickguard was constantly going [makes shrivelling noise]. So they're just literally taking the screws and driving them in wherever something's not laying flat or it's lifting. If you look at those guitars you'll see different hole patterns on most of them. People used to think when we were young, 'Oh, somebody just added holes.' But that's not the case," David says.

"That 70s finish really doesn't exist on anything else. The closest I've seen is a Pontiac colour called Mariner Turquoise"

DAVID DAVIDSON

"The scariest thing about owning those guitars is when you take the pickguard off to examine the electronics, getting them back on is not easy because they immediately start curling up," he continues. "Very scary. It's a nightmare... but that colour, it's right as rain, it's real, it's unquestionably Fender urethane. So that's a 70s finish of a colour that really doesn't exist on anything else. The closest colour that I've ever seen is a Pontiac colour called Mariner Turquoise from 1967. That's as close as I can get," David adds with a smile and a shrug. G

https://wellstrungguitars.com

14. This eye-catching 1971 Thinline was part of a small selection designed for the NAMM Show, though – unlike its showmates' – its colour was never documented on Freddie Tavares' chart

14

SIMPLE PLEASURES

John Osborne of The Brothers Osborne on discovering the Tele, trading up and why bad B-Bender technique is like too much cologne...

Words Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates

What does the Telecaster mean to you?
"As simple of a design as the Telecaster is, it's the most versatile guitar out there. It just works with any style, any amp, any pedal you put in front of it. The Telecaster works so well because it's just a guitar. When you add switches and knobs that do crazy things, you start getting away from the actual point of an electric guitar, which was to be loud enough to be heard over drums. Some guitars push you in a direction, and when you fight against it, it doesn't work as well. But the simplicity of the Telecaster allows you to find your voice. It's a desert island guitar."

Who were the first artists to make you aware of the Telecaster?
"I'm from Maryland and grew up right outside of Washington DC. That's where Danny Gatton was from and he was the first person I'd ever seen play a Telecaster. He had a *Hot Licks* video, just him with a Blackguard Tele. For a young guitar player who had seen the Jacksons, Flying Vs and all these flashy guitars, and was quite impressed with the spectacle, to hear this guy get so many sounds and styles out of such a simple guitar – I was dumbfounded."

1. As a Maryland native, John grew up 'next door' to Washington DC, home to Danny Gatton and his legendary Tele

What was your first Tele?
"When I was 21 I traded two guitars, a Silverface 70s Twin and $700 to buy a '68 Telecaster. It was the first vintage guitar I'd ever owned, my first real Telecaster, and I still play it to this day. Later, I took that neck and put it on another Tele body and had the back routed out for a Gene Parsons-style B-Bender. I've got semi-hotter pickups – and a very hot neck pickup – but those are the only modifications. The neck has been refretted a couple of times, but it's still the same, and the tuners are original. In my opinion, the neck is 75 per cent of the guitar. That's where you're feeling it the most."

"The Telecaster is the most versatile guitar out there… Its simplicity allows you to find your voice. It's a desert island guitar"

Some people think the stock Tele neck pickup lacks meat...
"Well, I disagree with that – without the filter, by the way. The filter is a cool sound, but it does paint you into a very specific corner and you're stuck there. But I love the way the front pickup sounds on a Tele, specifically in the middle position, because it gives you a brighter sound than you'd get with a fatter and louder pickup in the neck. Can you really get a big, punchy rock sound out of the Tele neck pickup? Not really. But Teles weren't really made for that anyway."

How do you use the B-Bender in your playing?
"When you first have a B-Bender, it's like the first time you bought cologne – it's very easy to overdo. You gotta find the sweet spot. The B-Bender I have, you can get it up to two full steps – which is something I wouldn't do at a gig because you're gonna pop a string very quickly. I typically do the whole-step bends or bend within a held chord. And then, with practice, you can do half-step bends, which is very tricky because it's easy to do it out of pitch."

How does the Tele complement the rest of your rig?
"On the road currently, I use the Two-Rock brand. For that style of amplifier, Eli Lester at Two-Rock has not only perfected it but taken it to a level I never knew it could go. It gives you all the punchiness and compression you want, with added everything. I have the Greer Lightspeed, which is a very transparent overdrive, and an Xotic AC Booster, which is so harmonically rich. Right now, I'm using [an Ibanez] Mostortion on one 'board and the JHS Bonsai on another because that gives a ton of different green box sounds. But honestly, a Telecaster going into an amp, with a booster to give you some fatness – that's as good as it gets." G

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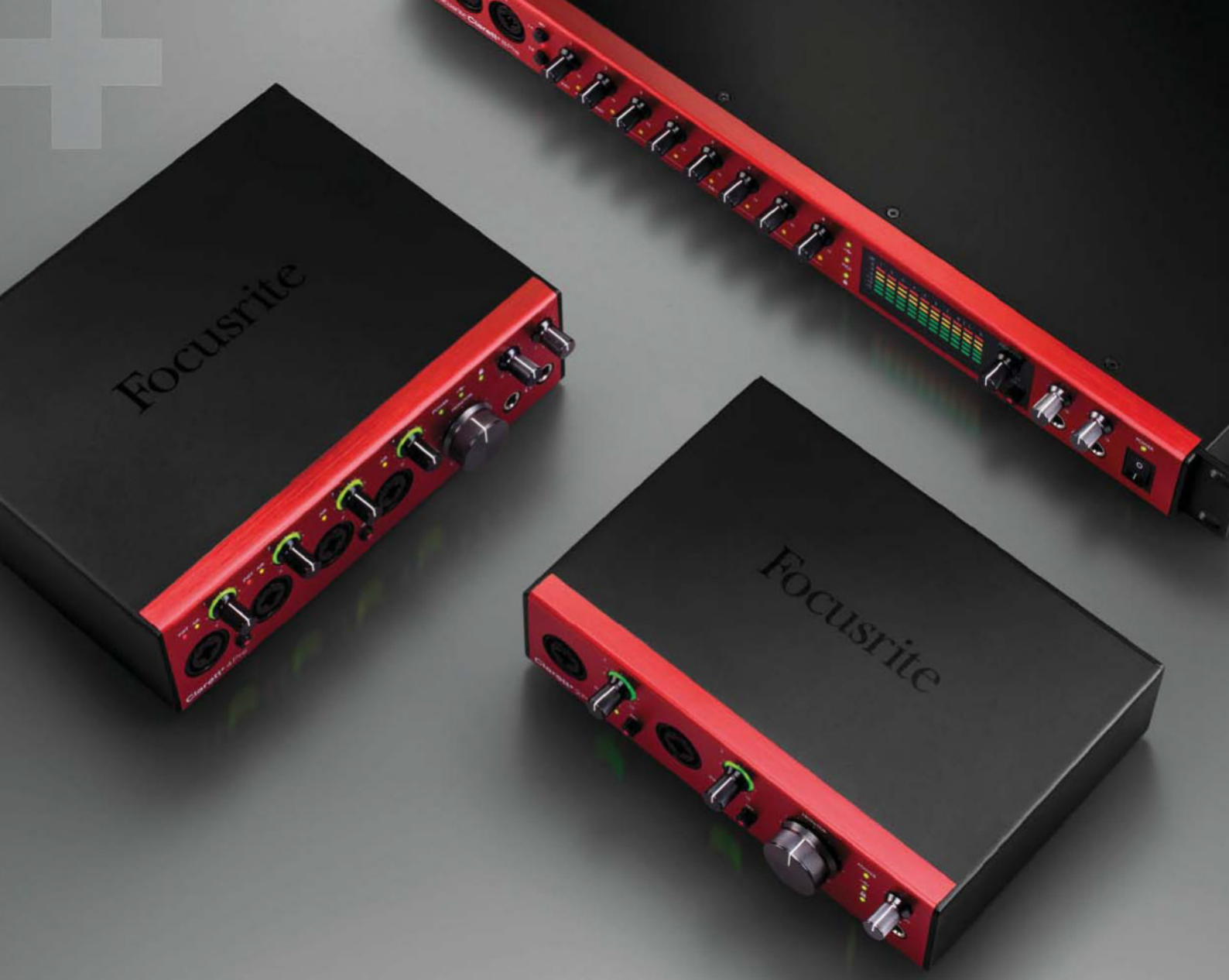

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T-TIME

The Telecaster was the original testbed solidbody electric guitar and it offers more scope for modding than any other model. Here are our top tips for curing common problems, improving playability and customising your Tele tone

Words Huw Price

1 SOCKET SOLUTION

Fender's original design for the Tele's output jack socket would have been sheer genius had it worked. Instead, you need a specialist tool or a lot of ingenuity to fit one and, in most cases, they'll eventually work loose or fall out once again. The Retrofit Jackplate is an all-in-one solution. The jack socket screws into the cup that is fixed inside the body hole by two screws that go diagonally into the wood. It's available in aluminium, chrome and gold, and the only tool you'll need is a crosshead screwdriver. And if you ever want to swap back, you can.

2 NO SQUEAL

A screaming guitar is fine, but the squeal of microphonic feedback certainly isn't. Unfortunately, Tele bridge pickups are quite prone to squeal when used with high-gain amps and pedals such as fuzz boxes. However, there is a simple workaround that might cure the problem and it costs next to nothing. Place some foam rubber on the bottom of the pickup cavity so it presses up against the metal inductance plate. It must be firm enough to dampen vibration but soft enough to ensure the height setting screws still work. And while you're at it, replace the spacer springs with rubber tubing.

3 INTONATION IMPROVEMENT

Six or three? Some die-hard Tele fans may insist on three saddles, but that means intonation adjustment will require some degree of compromise. For vintage-style saddles that are at right angles to the intonation screws, try Jerry Donahue's method of tuning the fretted D string slightly flat of the 12th fret harmonic, and the G string slightly sharp. Alternatively, check out slanted saddles or the compensated saddles offered by Wilkinson, Graph Tech and Gotoh. Wilkinson's swivel saddles and Mastery saddles probably offer the most exact intonation adjustment solution for three-saddle bridges.

PHOTO BY JOSH BRASTED/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

2. You can halt your Tele bridge pickup's squeal with a cheap and simple fix – a piece of foam rubber on the bottom of the pickup cavity

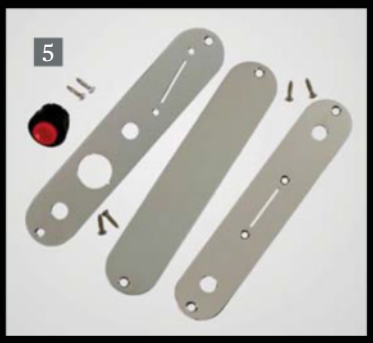
4. The Tele's controls are not known for their ergonomic ease, which is why some players – including Bill Kirchen – choose to flip the control plate around

4 CONTROL PLATE FLIP

No doubt ergonomics rather than aesthetics inspired Fender to revise the control layout for the Stratocaster, bringing the controls within easier reach for volume and tone adjustments and swells. It's also all too easy to knock that Tele switch while you're playing and one solution is to spin the control plate around. This has been a popular mod since the get go, with players such as Pete Townshend and Bill Kirchen having tried it at various times. If the idea appeals, remember you'll have to reverse the volume and tone pots as well as the switch so everything works as expected.

Some die-hard Tele fans may insist on three saddles, but that means intonation adjustment will require some degree of compromise

Brass as a saddle material offers fuller mids and excellent sustain, while steel units sound twangier and brighter in contrast



5. There's plenty of choice if you want to update your Tele's control plate. The range from RockRabbit Guitars, based in Indiana, even includes a plate with a kill switch hole (pictured far left)

CONTROL PLATE IMAGES IMAGES © ROCKRABBIT GUITARS

6. Tonal Tele tweaking can be rewarding if you experiment with different types of string saddle. From Fender's original brass or steel to aluminium and titanium, each has its signature sound

5 CONTROL UPGRADES

Plenty of suppliers now offer plates with an angled switch slot to make the switch feel more like a Strat's. Or you could buy a blank plate to drill your own holes for the potentiometers along with a three-way toggle switch. If you find the volume knob is too close to the switch, Rockinger offers a plate with the volume closer to the tone control, and RockRabbit's range includes a plate with a kill switch hole. For smooth swells and wah effects, consider a set of heavy knurl knobs for a sure grip.

6 SADDLE SWAPS

Saddle material makes a very audible difference to Telecaster tone and dynamic response. The earliest Esquire and Broadcaster models had steel and brass saddles with a 5/16-inch diameter, but Fender later reduced the diameter to 1/4-inch brass before changing to steel. Brass saddles offer fuller mids and excellent sustain, while steel units sound twangier and brighter in contrast. Titanium and aluminium, meanwhile, offer further tonal options, and mixing brass saddles on the top strings with steel for the low E and A will maximise body and twang. It's worth investigating saddles with string grooves or guides as these will also retain consistent string spacing and prevent the strings from fouling up against the height screws.

7 BRIDGE SWAPS

Vintage-style bridges have high sides that can be obstructive and uncomfortable. If they bother you, consider fitting a bridge with no sides. Alternatively, Gotoh, Barden and Callaham offer Tele bridges that have side scoops to facilitate pick access. Vintage specs will dictate chrome-plated steel, but brass and aluminium bridges are available, along with thicker steel bridges that promise longer sustain. Chopped bridges retain the stock screw mounting and allow the bridge pickup to be mounted onto the body. Consider converting to six saddles if you're bridge-swapping and make sure the new bridge's mounting screws will line up with the original screw holes.

8 TOP LOADING

In 1958, Fender briefly abandoned through-body stringing and introduced top-loading bridges. Six holes were drilled through the bridge's rear lip for strings to thread through and pass straight over the saddles. This only lasted until 1959, but Jimmy Page's Led Zep Tele was a top loader and Jim Campilongo plays one, too. If you try a top loader bridge, or simply drill holes in your existing bridge, expect extra twang, bite and a slinkier feel. Try top loading the plain strings for easier bending and through-body stringing the wound strings for solidity. Or do the opposite for twangy lows and thicker highs.

8

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9 THROUGH STRINGING

Fender probably introduced top loading to speed up the production process and lower costs, which is why many entry-level Teles are now top loaded. For a more traditional tone and feel, you can convert to through-body stringing, but even with a press drill it's tough to line the ferrule holes up perfectly. If you check out early Broadcasters and Telecasters, you can see it took Fender years to nail it. A pro luthier should be able to perform the conversion easily enough and fit a set of ferrules along with a suitable bridge in the process.

10 BIGSBY CONVERSION

If you like Telecasters, the chances are you appreciate Bigsby vibratos, too. There are various Bigsby options for Telecasters, including the original B16 kit from 1953, which replaces the bridge entirely but requires a 3/16-inch neck shim to compensate for the added pickup height. The B5 kit includes a front roller Bigsby plus a bridge plate and a rocking bridge with six saddles. To fit this one, you'll need to drill holes for the bridge posts. Both systems require extra screw holes, but Vibramate offers a fully reversible Bigsby mounting system.

8. Jimmy Page's Tele took advantage of the tonal benefits of a top-loading bridge. Accordingly, his resissued Mirror Tele features one, too

10. If you don't want to drill holes into your guitar, Fender's Vintera '60s Telecaster Bigsby comes loaded with a B50 vibrato

11. Clarence White and Gene Parsons' B-Bender system brings pedal steel sounds direct to your Tele. This rare Paisley model has a dual-action G and B-Bender

11 STRING BENDERS

Country players have long used Teles to simulate pedal steel guitars. It involves some very tricky string bending, so Tele virtuoso Clarence White and Byrds bandmate Gene Parsons invented the Parsons White StringBender. This mechanical device has a lever attached to the strap button that bends the B string sharp by a tone when the neck is pulled down. Parsons later designed the Parsons Green system and the Hipshot B-Bender, operated via the rear strap button or by palm levers. Other options include Peters and Certano palm benders that operate on the G and B strings individually.

11

12 BRIGHTENING NECK PICKUPS

Players often complain about neck pickups sounding too dark, but before getting into pickup swaps, take some time to adjust the heights of both pickups to optimise the level and frequency balance. If that doesn't produce the desired results, your options are to snip the cover's ground connection, replace a brass cover with nickel, or retrofit an open top cover. Be warned: the neck pickup will buzz when you touch it when the cover isn't grounded. You can also decouple the neck pickup from the tone control by soldering the tone control jumper to the bridge pickup's hot wire on the switch.

13 BRIDGE PICKUP OPTIONS

The range of aftermarket bridge pickups is vast, and most players tend to go for vintage-style reissues or hotter versions thereof. Oil City's Wapping Wharf is a particularly interesting vintage option with a tapped coil for twangy mid-50s tones and early 50s midrange grunt in a single pickup. Danny Gatton fans may like the clean and quiet tones of a Joe Barden pickup, while the Seymour Duncan Little '59 and DiMarzio's Chopper T offer humbucker-type tone in a Tele-sized package. You can also rout the body and buy a custom bridge for conventional P-90, humbucker and Filter'Tron conversions.

14 NECK PICKUP OPTIONS

Players have been swapping out Tele neck pickups since the 1950s, with a conventional-style humbucker being the most common choice. But the Telecaster's construction allows you to fit pretty much any pickup if you're okay with routing the body. Strat pickups are possible (but arguably unnecessary) if you just need a bit more treble, and other options include P-90s, mini-humbuckers and Filter'Trons. Telecasters are surprisingly well suited to jazz, and a Charlie Christian pickup really unlocks that potential. Gold Foils are becoming increasingly popular for roosty-style players – and for metal or rock, check out the Seymour Duncan Hot Rails.

15 NASHVILLE MOD

Some Fender owners want their Strats to sound more like Teles and their Teles to sound like Strats. Country pickers soon devised a way of getting the best of both worlds by fitting a Strat pickup to the middle position of their Teles to approximate those in-between tones. To do this, you must rout a cavity into the body and cut a hole in the pickguard, but if you ever change your mind, a new pickguard will conceal the evidence. A five-way switch conversion might be good, too. Alternatively, a Fender Nashville Tele is an off-the-shelf option.

14. The humbucking neck pickup in Joe Bonamassa's '52 Tele was fitted by Manny's Music around the late 60s – and it necessitates some routing of the body

Players have been swapping out Tele neck pickups since the 1950s, with a conventional-style humbucker being the most common choice

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16 1950S TONE CONTROL MOD

If treble roll-off bothers you when you dial back your volume control, then rewiring the tone control connection might be preferable to having a treble bleed capacitor on the volume control. This simple modification mimics the way Gibson wired tone controls in the 1950s, by taking the feed from the output (centre) tag of the volume potentiometer, rather than the input (outer) tag. This mod is as simple as it gets because you only need to desolder the wire and resolder it. You don't even need to remove the strings – and if you change your mind later on, just move it back.

17 POT VALUES

Since the get go, most Fenders with bright-sounding single-coil pickups have been fitted with 250k control potentiometers to sweeten the treble. Around 1969 Fender began installing 1meg-ohm pots in Telecasters, which makes Tele from that era, and well into the 1970s, sound noticeably brighter. Teles with a neck humbucker can benefit from having a 500k volume pot, with a 470k or 500k resistor connected between the bridge pickup's hot connection and ground to balance them out. If you're upgrading a budget guitar, the pot holes in the control plate may need widening to accommodate CTS potentiometers.

18 SWITCHING UP

Replacing the three-way switch with a four-way or five-way allows you to exploit the full potential of the stock pickups. The regular centre setting combines the pickups in parallel, but the extra position of a four-way switch can be used to wire them in series for a pseudo humbucker tone with higher output and fatter mids. With a five-way switch you have an out-of-phase setting for a scratchy and honky tone that sounds funky when clean and like a Spaghetti Western soundtrack with fuzz. From the outside, your guitar will look totally stock.

Replacing the three-way switch with a four-way or five-way allows you to exploit the full potential of the stock pickups

15 The 'best of both' Player Plus Nashville Telecaster features a Noiseless Strat pickup in the middle position

20. Modern Tele switching has only been around since the late 60s and many alternatives exist to produce different tonal textures

19 ELDRED ESQUIRE MOD

Stock Esquire wiring has the pickup disconnected from the tone control in the back position and connected to the tone control in the middle position. The front position has a preset treble roll-off that's so dark, most players find it unusable. Mike Eldred of Fender's Custom Shop conceived a wiring mod that gives this setting a thicker cocked-wah-type tone and makes an Esquire sound more like a Les Paul Junior. It's excellent for powerchords and soloing, and your Esquire will have three distinct and useful tones. Try it if you fancy converting your Tele to an Esquire or before converting your Esquire into a Tele.

20 VINTAGE WIRING

The bridge/both/neck wiring scheme that is typical of today's Telecasters wasn't actually a thing until 1968. Even so, some players prefer the earlier wiring with bridge/neck/treble cut settings. The both together setting is missing, but you could install a switching pot or a four-way switch to include it. The earlier Broadcaster-era wiring has the treble cut setting but didn't include a tone control. Consequently, the neck pickup sounds clearer and more open than usual, and the second control acts as a pickup blender. Wiring schematics are available online and both settings are worth trying if you're handy with a soldering iron. G

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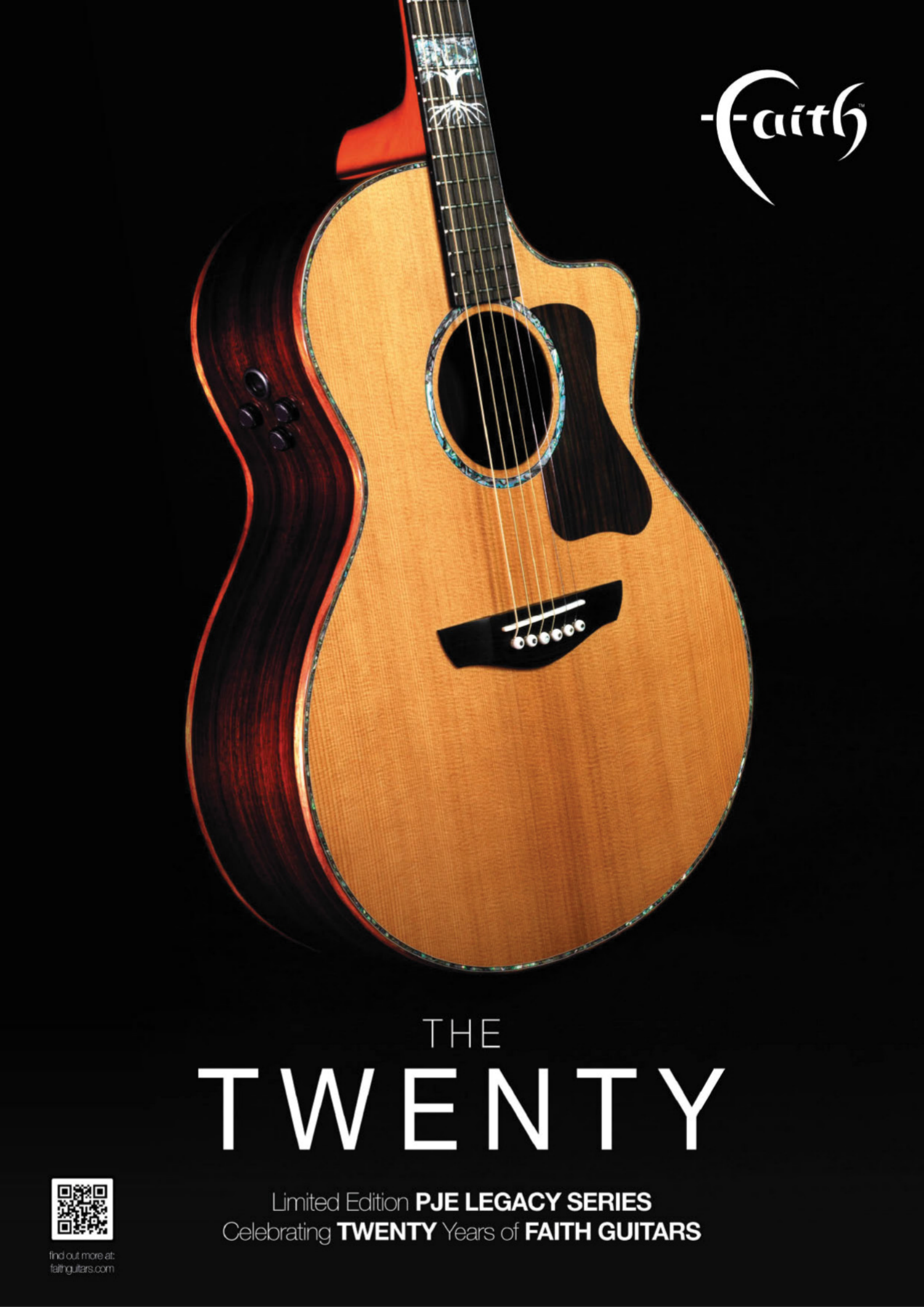
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COUNTRY KING

'Caster master Marty Stuart recounts a half-century love affair with the snub-nosed Fender model, from falling for the twang and surviving the honky-tonks, to the spookiest session with his iconic 'Clarence' Tele

Words Henry Yates

It's not easy to upstage Marty Stuart. Since 1989, when the Mississippi bandleader signed his star-making deal with MCA and set out to "put the image back into country", he's walked the boards in scarves, rhinestones and hand-stitched bolero jackets, with that get-up topped off in later years by a shock of silver hair that makes him resemble an avuncular werewolf. "When you come out dressed up like Porter Wagoner and call your band the Fabulous Superlatives," he drawls, "you better be able to do something."

"[My love for the Tele] was from Luther Perkins' playing. And to this day, my favourite record of all time is 'At Folsom Prison'"

Of course, the main event at a Stuart show is the bob and weave of the man's picking, which drove him to commercial peaks on 1989's *Hillbilly Rock*, 1991's *Tempted* and 1992's *This One's Gonna Hurt You* (all gold-sellers), and often thrills on this year's *Altitude*. But for all his skill and showmanship, you might find your eye wandering to the so-called 'Clarence' Telecaster that has spent four decades vying with Keith Richards' Micawber and Bruce Springsteen's Mutt as the most storied snub-nosed Fender in history.

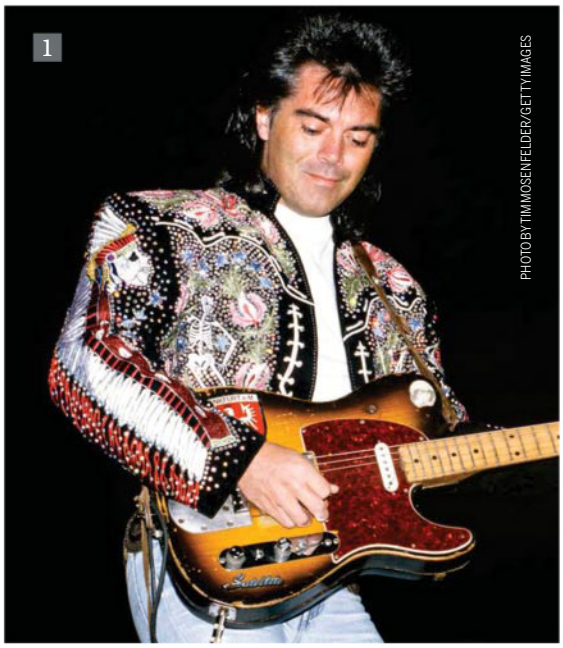
To take you right back to the start, how did you first fall for the Fender Telecaster?
"It was from Luther Perkins' playing. And to this day, my favourite record of all time is Johnny Cash *At Folsom Prison*. Luther Perkins was my original guitar hero. Closely followed by Don Rich from The Buckaroos. And he was closely followed by Roy Nichols with The Strangers. These were the guys that I looked at when I was just a kid down in Mississippi learning to play guitar. I hoped to one day own a Telecaster, but I couldn't believe it when I finally got one. And it's still the guitar of my dreams."

What was the very first Tele you ever owned?
"It was a '73 or '74 blonde Tele. I was trying to learn how to play like Clarence White from The Byrds. So I took that guitar down to Sho-Bud Steel Guitar Company in Nashville and Shot Jackson, the owner, he put a B-string bender in it for me. I wanted it to look like and sound like Clarence's guitar. So that was the first Tele I had. I really didn't know how to work the B-Bender, but it got me started. I don't have it any more. There's a kid in Arkansas who bought that guitar."

What is it about the feel and sound of a Tele that works for you?
"It just fits. Sometimes you get in a car and say, 'This is my car.' Or put on a coat and say, 'That's my coat.' The Telecaster, it just fits my hands. It fits around my neck right. It doesn't bother me that it's got no top cutaway or third pickup. I mean, one of my favourite guitars I have is a 1952 Esquire – it was owned by Mick Ronson – and that only has one pickup. That's all it needs because it's just a great guitar. Y'know, I appreciate the Stratocaster, but I really can't do it justice. I love the sound of both those guitars, but it's two different planets, two different universes – and I'm a Tele guy."

'Twang' is the term most often associated with the Telecaster. Was that an attractive quality for you?
"Yeah, the twang. Of course. I mean, if you listen to the solo from *Workin' Man Blues* by James Burton, I don't care who you are and how close you think you can play that solo – you're not playin' it. I'd argue that they could not have done that song exactly that way even one more time. It was one of those things that happened, and then it left the room.

"But there's the Telecaster twang – and then there's that California cool. There's the outer edge of California cool that wraps around the twang. Clarence White had



1. Just as Marty wasn't afraid to stand out from the crowd, the 'Clarence' Tele has notable quirks, including an overthick body, a prototype B-Bender, Scruggs banjo tuners, and a Strat single coil in the neck position and modded bridge pickup from steel player Red Rhodes – plus its decorative stickers

"Clarence is a 'good at everything' guitar – it has a thousand different personalities. I can only imagine where Clarence [White] would have taken it, had he lived"

2. Marty Stuart became the custodian of the Clarence White Tele in 1980. And aside from a few minor updates, "it's the same dirt that was on that guitar the day I touched it for the first time," he tells us

PHOTO BY ALYSSE GAFKJEN

that. Roy Nichols had it. James Burton had it in spades. That whole cluster of California guys, they could make their Teles twang, but they also knew how to put palm trees and Sunset Boulevard and cool cars around them. Which made it just ultra cool. When you get to the West Coast, they just seem to let it fly out there."

Why do you think the country scene fell in love with the Telecaster?
"Well, I think Buck Owens said it best. He said, 'In the honky-tonks, we needed something that was louder than the crowds.' And then, like Keith Richards once said, sometimes you needed a weapon. Isn't there even a piece of footage of Keith whacking a guy with his guitar on stage? Telecasters made good weapons, too."

Did you ever have cause to test that theory? There are some hair-raising stories about honky-tonks that put up chickenwire back in the day to protect the bands from flying bottles...
"I think that was a reality. I never experienced that. I remember there was a redneck honky-tonk in Mississippi and there were two Doberman Pinschers on short leashes, with crazy guys with crazy looks in their eyes, just daring anyone to try something. That was a little weird. There was a place in Waco, Texas, that was really rough. I don't remember chickenwire myself, but I know it's an absolute fact that some of those juke-joints

"I wouldn't take anything from that rough and rowdy honky-tonk experience. It was an absolutely informative period of my life"

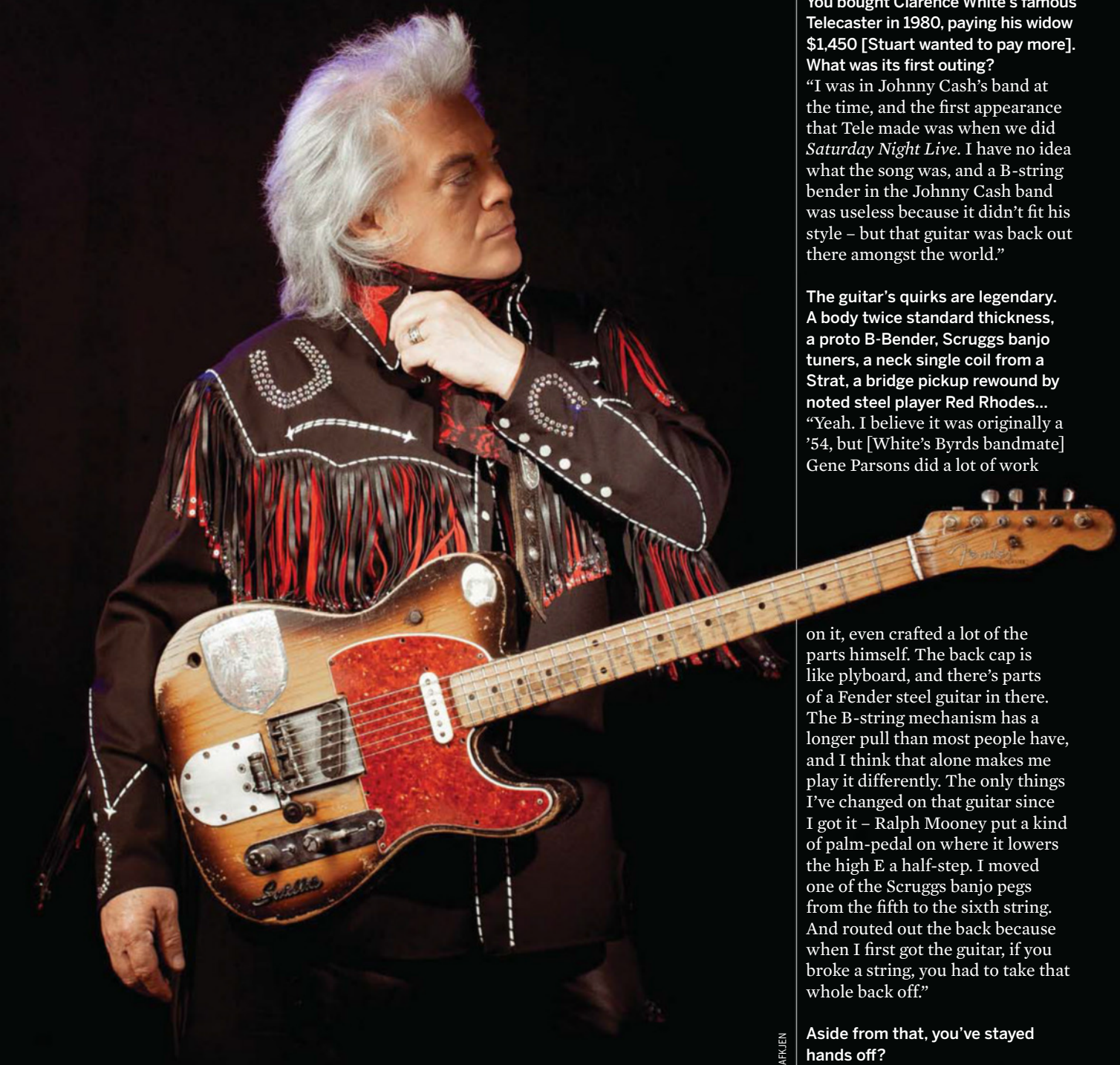


PHOTO BY ALYSSE GAFKJEN

had that stuff. We're in theatres and nice halls these days – but I wouldn't take anything from that rough and rowdy honky-tonk experience. It was an absolutely informative period of my life."

You bought Clarence White's famous Telecaster in 1980, paying his widow $1,450 [Stuart wanted to pay more]. What was its first outing?
"I was in Johnny Cash's band at the time, and the first appearance that Tele made was when we did *Saturday Night Live*. I have no idea what the song was, and a B-string bender in the Johnny Cash band was useless because it didn't fit his style – but that guitar was back out there amongst the world."

The guitar's quirks are legendary. A body twice standard thickness, a proto B-Bender, Scruggs banjo tuners, a neck single coil from a Strat, a bridge pickup rewound by noted steel player Red Rhodes...
"Yeah. I believe it was originally a '54, but [White's Byrds bandmate] Gene Parsons did a lot of work on it, even crafted a lot of the parts himself. The back cap is like plyboard, and there's parts of a Fender steel guitar in there. The B-string mechanism has a longer pull than most people have, and I think that alone makes me play it differently. The only things I've changed on that guitar since I got it – Ralph Mooney put a kind of palm-pedal on where it lowers the high E a half-step. I moved one of the Scruggs banjo pegs from the fifth to the sixth string. And routed out the back because when I first got the guitar, if you broke a string, you had to take that whole back off."

Aside from that, you've stayed hands off?
"Yeah, other than that, it's the same dirt that was on that guitar the day I touched it for the first time. There's still that 'Nudie the

Rodeo Tailor' sticker that Phil Kaufman originally put on there. It says 'Satellite' down low on the body, which is off of the dashboard of a Plymouth Satellite car. And the one that's fading is a flag from Germany."

What makes the Clarence Tele such a good recording guitar?
"It's a 'good at everything' guitar. There are just certain guitars where the checklist is full. That guitar has a thousand different personalities. It is totally unique in each of those personalities. You can put a thousand Telecasters around it and they're all probably wonderful, but that guitar, in my heart, it just speaks different. It just has a different voice. It also has a great legacy. I can only imagine where Clarence would have taken it, had he lived. He's like Jimi Hendrix, he was just getting started. There is no telling. If I think too hard about the legacy of that guitar, I'll fall down. I just have to keep moving forward and play."

Keith Richards once said that you get the best from a Fender guitar by pairing it with a Fender amp. Given that you're running the Clarence through a 70s silver-panel Deluxe, would you agree with that?
"100 per cent. I've found Fender guitars and Fender amps a good combination. The 'Silverface' Deluxe, that tends to be where that guitar's voice sings. It all depends on what you're looking for. But the sounds that I love tend to be those West Coast 60s kinda country guitar styles, like James Burton and Clarence, Ralph Mooney's steel guitar tone, Roy Nichols' guitar tone, Jimmy Bryant's guitar tone. Those kind of players, they were bitey, they had muscle. That's what drew my ear to that kind of sound."

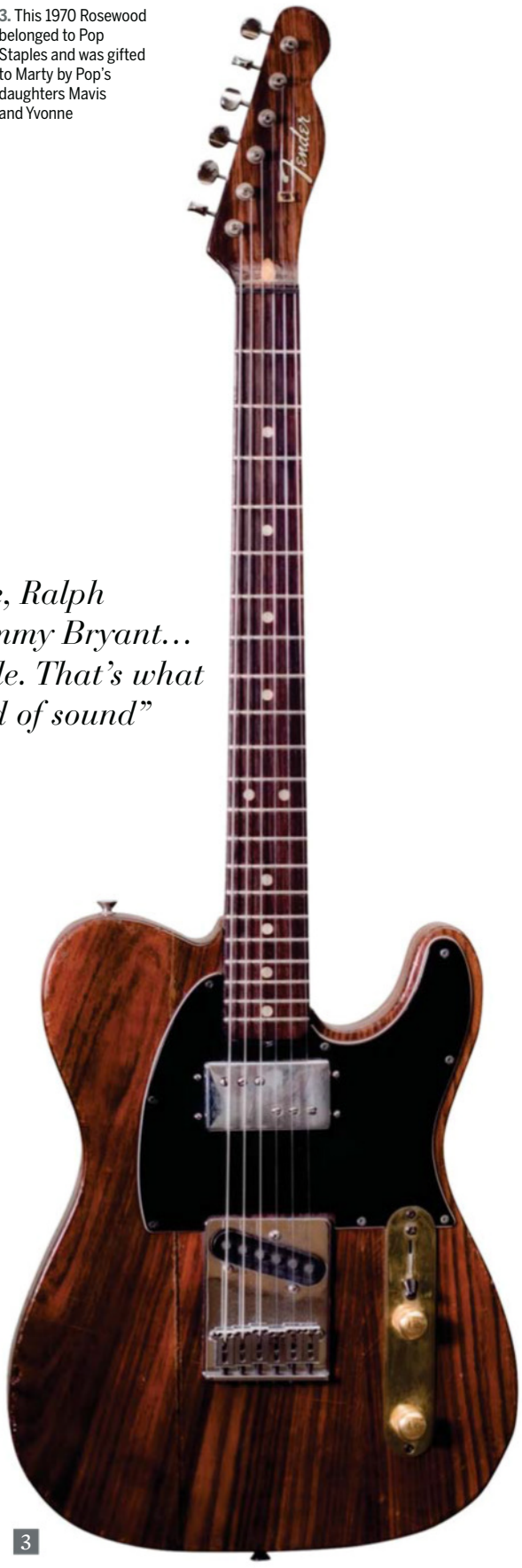
What are the other great Telecasters in your collection?
"There's that 1952 Esquire owned by Mick Ronson. That is probably one of the greatest Esquires in the world. There's a song that I recorded back in the 90s called *High On A Mountain Top* – I think it was actually Richard Bennett who played the part on that guitar, on my record. But that guitar growls – it's like a tiger. It's wonderful. And then there's a 1970 Rosewood Tele that Pops Staples played that Mavis and Yvonne [Staples] gave me. And that's the one that Pops plays on *The Last Waltz* film. So that one comes to mind."

What have been your most memorable sessions with Clarence?
"Well, I'll give you this. There was a Byrds record called *Byrdmaniax* [1971]. Do you remember it? The album sleeve had the silver masks, right? I think they call them death masks. They'd plaster casted all the guys' faces and painted them silver. One day in 2017, Clarence White's daughter Michelle called me and said, 'I want you to have the mask of my dad from the *Byrdmaniax* cover.' I went, 'Well, I'd be honoured.' So she came by the studio and it was in a shadow box. I just laid it on the floor next to me in the studio. We were making my *Way Out West* record at the time and there was this song called *Whole Lotta Highway (With A Million Miles To Go)*. I was trying to play this really straight-ahead Clarence White kinda solo on the B-Bender. And I look down and there's Clarence looking up at me from the floor. That was probably one of the more memorable moments I've ever shared with that guitar. But it worked because it turned out to be a pretty good solo!"

"James Burton, Clarence, Ralph Mooney, Roy Nichols, Jimmy Bryant… Those players had muscle. That's what drew my ear to that kind of sound"

Clarence is such a historically significant instrument – aren't you ever afraid to hit it hard?
"Nah. It can take it. That's what Telecasters were born to do!"

Altitude is set for release on 10 March. The *Country Star* single is available now **https://martystuart.net**



3. This 1970 Rosewood belonged to Pop Staples and was gifted to Marty by Pop's daughters Mavis and Yvonne

3

GREEN FINGERS

Status Quo's Francis Rossi on baiting the purists, swapping guitars with Badfinger, and why he's not an all-time-great Tele player

Words Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates

1. Not a Tele by design, but Francis has found Leo's G&L "almost a Strat, almost a Tele" ASAT to be a welcome companion in the studio

2. Rossi's famous green Tele was sanded, painted, drilled and modded – much to the horror of some traditionalists

We're talking to a series of great guitarists about the Telecaster...
"Well, I'll find you someone who can play one! You really need to be a shit-hot player to make a Telecaster sound good. Particularly when playing lead. I never thought I did. I still don't. People think I'm looking for compliments: 'Oh no, you're a player.' I fuck up so badly. I know a lot more than I did, but I still look at the fretboard when I'm in the midst of the gig and think, 'Oh God...'"

How did the Telecaster come into your life?
"We were touring with Badfinger. Pete Ham had this Grimshaw and he said, 'Do you want to swap?' So I swapped my Gibson Stereo for this very average Grimshaw. Within a week or so, the bridge collapsed. We were in Scotland somewhere and the [tour manager] got two Telecasters brought in. Three days later, I had to make up my mind which one to keep. There was a blonde one and a sunburst. And I kept the sunburst."

"You really need to be a shit-hot player to make a Telecaster sound good. Particularly when playing lead. I never thought I did"

In the late 60s, you bought your iconic '57-bodied green Tele. How did it end up looking like that?
"I sanded it down because I thought I'd like just the wood colour. Within a few weeks, I'd painted it matt black. You know, you're at that age where you're like, 'Black! Yeah!' It looked fabulous. But then it had dried out by the time I got to the gig, and I got it out and thought, 'Oh, it looks fucking horrible.' So I sanded it down again and painted it with this green Ronseal that you could see the grain through. I think it was a kind of rebellion: 'Oh, I'm wild, look at me, I've painted my guitar and drilled holes in it, I don't care...'"

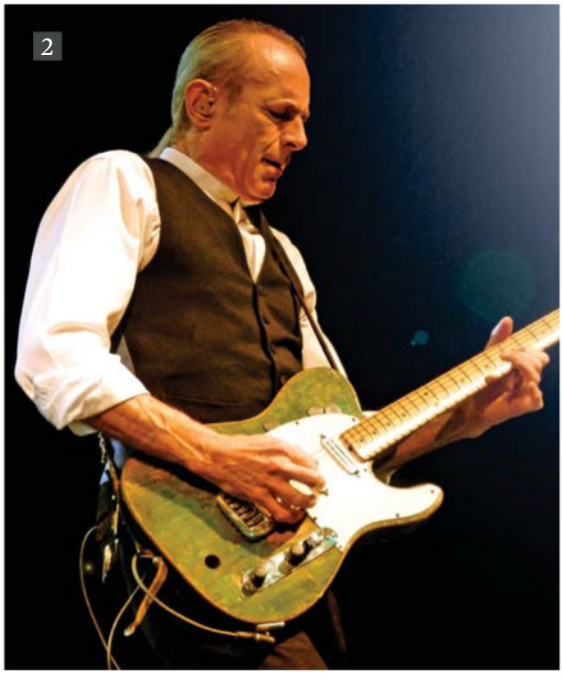


PHOTO BY DICK BARNATT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

You made a few mechanical changes, too?
"One time in Belgium, a pickup had died, or dropped half its output. So I put in another one and then I wanted to go for the five-way switch to get that slight out-of-phase thing. I like to mess around with different tones. So I went for Lace Sensors. The real Tele hardcore were saying, 'Oh, it's sacrilege what you've done there.' But that's just going to make me do it all the more! I put on a Gibson tune-o-matic bridge, first off, which added to what I call the 'nuttiness' of the sound. It wasn't so spiny. But later I went to metal saddles – one time I used a brass nut as well – so I was making it screechier and screechier. Obviously, you're losing top-end off your ears as you get older."

What made you so loyal to that Tele?
"I got used to it, I think. I liked the maple neck. I liked the way it looked. I'm not a person that gets much satisfaction from change. And the reason that Tele went in 2015 was because it wouldn't stay in tune. I could not get the fucker to stay in tune. It just wouldn't have it any more. I don't know why. Subsequently, I hear it now occasionally on certain records or on live things that come up on YouTube, and I think it sounds lovely. However, there is a myth that Rick [Parfitt] and I played Teles all the time. Various albums, various songs, we used lots of different guitars. I even had some punter arguing with me. I told him it's a Stratocaster on *Down Down*. 'No, it's not.' Yeah, it fucking is! But I don't wish to break the myth. That Telecaster served me very well."

In your opinion, what's the defining Quo song featuring that green Tele?
"The one that comes to mind is *Don't Waste My Time*. It's as a rhythm guitar that I always found that Tele was particularly nice-sounding, and that's what I wanted to play. I'll be lying in bed tonight after the gig thinking, 'Shit, I should have told him a different song.' But let's go with *Don't Waste My Time*." G

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ARIEL POSEN

It's been a while since we caught up with the renowned Canadian guitarist, so when his recent UK shows came within hailing distance, we welcomed him back to talk tone, technique and touring

Words David Mead **Photography** Olly Curtis

The first (and most obvious) question we ask Ariel as we settle down for our chat is if his current tour is going well. "I'm definitely feeling the love," he says. "We tend to try to come here annually and I guess because it's been over two years of not being able to, I feel like everyone's hungry for music. I've just been over the moon with the show – it's been amazing."

When Ariel's name comes up in a casual meeting of guitar players, the word you hear used most often is 'tone'. He's renowned for having created his own unique soundscape with custom instruments, including a mighty baritone, and a pedalboard that has been put together with an alchemist's attention to sonic detail. Add to this some finely crafted songs and an exuberant live show, and it's no wonder he's playing to packed houses across the globe.

As we know, the wasteland created by the recent pandemic was a bad time for musicians, but the enforced hibernation it resulted in turned out to be a creative catalyst for Ariel. "Well, my lockdown time was very busy. I've been just writing a lot and putting out a handful of music. I put out my record *Headway* that came out at the beginning of 2021. I started recording that in December 2019 and then, once everything was ready, we were just playing the waiting game to release it."

To watch Ariel demonstrate his guitars and pedalboard plus a few tasty slide licks at *Guitarist*'s studio, head on over to **http://bit.ly/guitaristextra**

Ariel's custom-made Mule Resophonic baritone guitar is in B standard tuning and sounds like thunder!

And there have been some subsequent releases, too?
"Well, I started writing a bunch of new songs and went into the studio in late 2021. I recorded about 20 solo improvised guitar pieces and I didn't know what I was going to do with them. I sat on it for a few months and decided to put it all out as an album called *Mile End*. So 2021 was a very busy year of releases because I'd put out *Headway* at the beginning of the year and then a couple of months later I actually recorded an acoustic version of the whole album. Also, by the end of the year, I had written almost 30 songs – primarily a bunch

"It took a couple months to be inspired [during lockdown], but I got into it. The routine of being at home lends itself well to being creative"

of songs that were going to be on future records – but then I still had some songs that didn't make the record for *Headway*.

"I also had a selection of five songs that I really, really loved, but I didn't feel they had a place on future projects. I just wanted them to be their own thing, so I recorded them at the end of 2021 and that became the *Downtown* EP, which came out at the end of July 2022. That was the only record I've done for myself that was all remote. Drums were done by my friend Ash Soan in Norfolk. We then started touring again, at the end of August 2021."

So even through the pandemic, you managed to keep busy.
"Yeah, I was very grateful. It took a couple months to just feel purpose and just be inspired. But once it hit, I really got into it. Just the consistency and the routine of being at home lends itself very well to being creative. I had so many things I was already doing outside of just touring that were done at home – like recording sessions for people, occasional teaching, producing, doing the occasional live stream, stuff like

that – so it was just like, 'Okay, now everyone's doing that, so I guess I'll just keep doing it, or do a bit more of it.'

"With writing, you know, I don't write on the road because it's so full on, so much is going on. I'm not really feeling creative in the sense that I'm not just going to mark off an hour or two to have a session. I have to do it at home where I'm just in a different mindset."

Many people have said to us that they used that period to re-evaluate a lot of things.

"Yes, big time! I think I realised how burnt out I was. I love what I do and being busy and travelling around, but I was tired. As the first couple of things started getting cancelled or rescheduled, I was starting to feel down. Then as a few more things started getting cancelled and pushed back I started to get relieved. I think I needed the time and I tried to be light with it because I know a lot of people didn't have a good time and lost people and lost work...

"I took it as a time to reignite everything I was grateful for. Sure, I would have loved to just keep trucking along like we were, but I tried to have my perception set the right way and take it for what it was and make the most of it, you know what I mean?"

A 'board essential, Ariel's Hudson Electronics Broadcast-AP is always part of his recording sound

What range of gear did you take into the studio to do your different recording projects?

"I am always using my Two-Rock, my Victoria Reverberato, but we had a couple of other amps, too. But I think I primarily used the Two-Rock and I have a collection of guitars I like to use such as the [Mule Resophonic] StratoMule, the Jazzmaster, my Strat, my Josh Williams Mockingbird, my Collings 360, the Collings SoCo. That was for *Headway*. For *Mile End*, I went into the studio with the Mule, the Jazzmaster and I have a 50s Kay, which is an acoustic and it's [been refurbished] by this guy named Reuben [Cox] in LA's Old Style Guitar Shop. He takes these old guitars and puts a rubber bridge and flat-wounds on them and pickup inside, and it gives you this really different, interesting sound.

"I went into the studio with the StratoMule, Jazzmaster and a refurbished 50s Kay for a really different interesting sound"

A follow-up to 2021's *Mile End* album, titled *Mile End II*, will be released on 13 January

So *Mile End* is those three guitars and I ran them through an old Gibson Explorer amp and a 60s, maybe a '68, Super Reverb."

Did recording the EP remotely mean a change of gear you had on hand to record with?
"Yeah, for the *Downtown* EP I had access to everything. So I used my Two-Rock and I used an Insulander combo amp, which is built in Stockholm and it's like a 30-watt Fender-style amp. I used the Jazzmaster, the Mockingbird and the Mule. I have a Dahlberg fretless guitar made by these guys in Denmark. They built me this fretless electric with flat-wounds and I used that on the EP, which is very, very fun and different. The Kay is on there a lot, the rubber-bridge guitar. I'm probably forgetting some, but those are the main ones."

What about outboard gear?
"For pedals, it was similar to what I have here today, but I use my [Hudson Electronics] Broadcast-AP almost exclusively for recording, it's my favourite recording pedal. I like to mix different fuzzes – the DanDrive fuzzes are great, R2R Electric fuzzes I've been using a lot lately. There's the Chase Bliss Automatone and the [CXM] 1978.

"For delays, I get crazy. I'll use anything and experiment. The [Chase Bliss] Thermae is used almost exclusively in the studio for textures and weird things…"

The Poly Effects Beebo is a big one I use for recording. I have my favourite kind of overdrives like a [Vemuram] Jan Ray or [KingTone] Duellist, or a Tube Screamer or Blues Breaker type of pedal. I like just a really fat, full Zonk kind of pedal. For delays in the studio, I get crazy. I'll use anything and I'll experiment. I use certain pedals for certain things. So like the [Chase Bliss] Thermae is just used once live, but it's used almost exclusively in the studio for textures and weird things like that."

How do you get on when it comes to fretless guitar? Does it relate to playing slide in that you're playing on the frets rather than behind them?

"I thought the same thing, but it's not at all easy. If you play slide on a fretless it's essentially the same thing. But playing with your fingers intonating is difficult, especially if you're playing chords. So it takes a little shift of your mind to approach it differently than you would a standard guitar.

Watch Ariel take us through his 'board and offer some tips on playing technique in our accompanying video at **http://bit.ly/guitaristextra**

"Fretless makes me play a little differently and inspires sounds that slide doesn't quite do. It gives a slippery sound. It's really fun"

"Fretless makes me play a little differently and it inspires different sounds that the slide doesn't quite do. I use it a lot on sessions for other people or when I'm producing, just like chordal things – it gives a slidey, slippery sound that doesn't sound like slide or anything else. It's really fun."

You're known for using a lot of alternative tunings and yet you tour with two guitars – one dropped to B standard, the other in open C. How does this work out on the live stage?

"Here's the thing. I'm still at a point touring-wise where I don't have someone taking my gear around for me. The most I can bring, without it being a huge hassle, is two guitars. So when I'm recording, I'll use a lot of guitars in standard tuning, I'll use guitars and open E, open E♭, open D, open D♭, C sometimes. The thing about having a B standard guitar and open C guitar is that the open C one can be an open C#, open D, open E♭, open E by using a capo. That gives me that possibility without having different guitars. And same with the B standard. I can be in standard tuning, I can be in D standard, D♭ standard, C standard... It just gives me all the options while not having to bring 10 guitars out with me. So right now that's the reason I have those two with me.

"When I'm recording, anything goes. I'm not an elitist with tunings, I just like the low sounds, but as much as the low sound is satisfying, it won't always sit well in a mix. In fact, I use the baritone stuff a lot in my music, but when I'm producing music for others and doing other sessions, often it doesn't really have a place. You want your sounds and your parts to be bright and you want them to cut through. So I tend to lean towards brighter-sounding guitars and standard tuning and shinier kinds of things."

What attracted you to playing in drop tunings first of all?

"It was kind of an accident. It was on my first record, *How Long*. I have this old Teisco Tulip guitar, it's super temperamental, just kind of crappy, I bought it for 50 bucks. I was just messing around with it and I was like, 'What happens if I tune it to

This Fender Custom Shop Jazzmaster, made for Ariel by Carlos Lopez, came into his life a little over three years ago

"I'm not a guy that's ripping up and down the fretboard. I don't need a fast action, but obviously I need higher action for slide. But I like a fight, I dig in"

B standard, just for fun?' I recorded a song called *Get You Back* on it – the whole song is that guitar – and it just had this mojo to it that I suddenly felt drawn to. But that guitar was so temperamental, I could never play it live, it would feed back. So that's what inspired me to ask Matt [Eich at Mule Resophonic Guitars], 'Hey, can we make a Strat version of the Mule in B standard, so it can handle it?' Once I got it and I started getting used to it, I found that it didn't sound like a baritone. It sounded like a guitar with just a wider range of frequency than a normal electric does in standard tuning. You know how it is, once you get used to it, it's hard to leave it. It's very satisfying and it's just become a signature part of my sound."

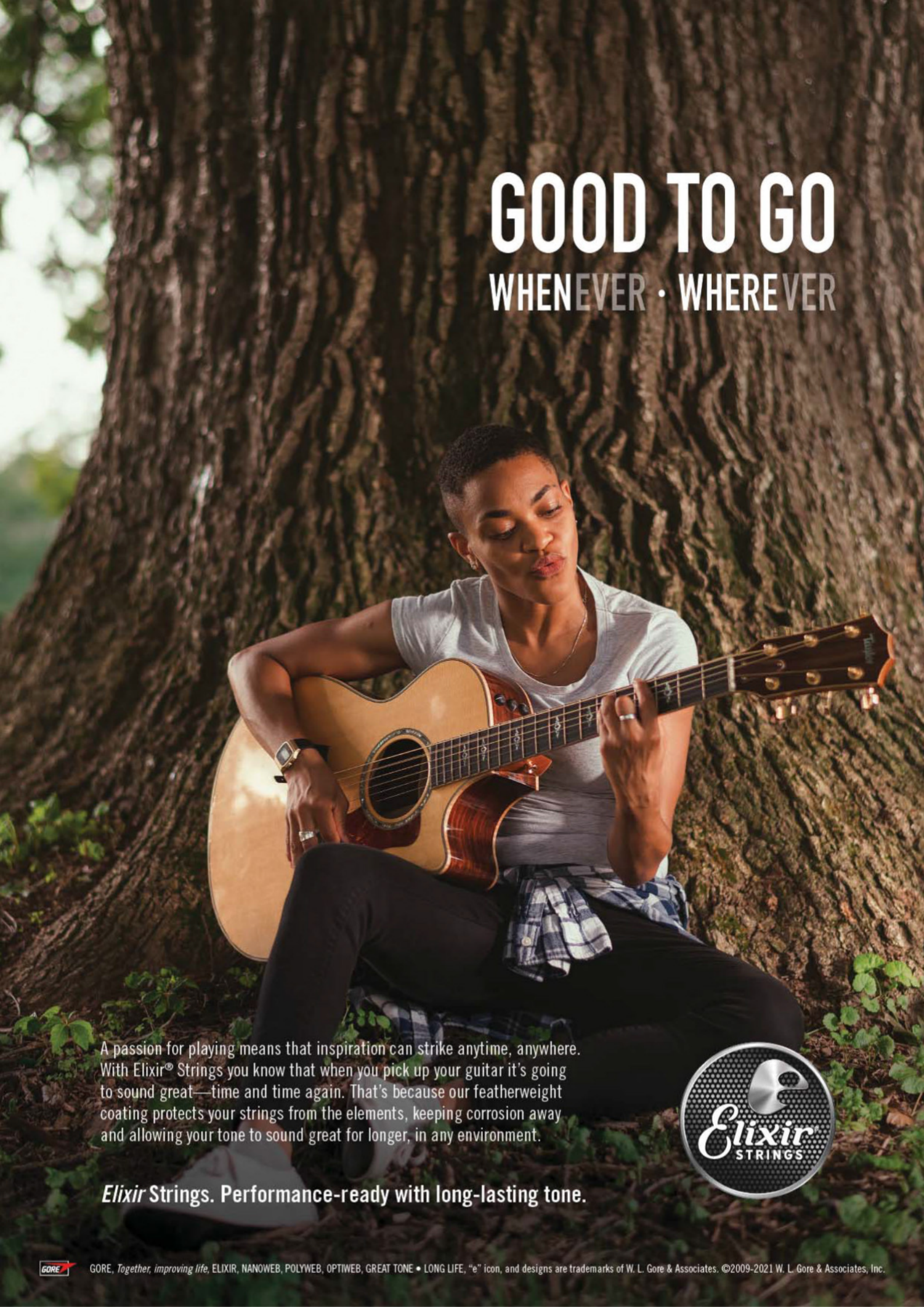
What gauge of string do you use on the B standard guitar?

"I've been doing 0.017 to 0.064 and that just makes B standard or open C feel like you're playing 11s, essentially. But when I play standard tuning, I still play 0.011 to 0.054. I have a couple of Telecasters that I like with 12s for some reason. I like a fight, I'm not a guy that's ripping up and down the fretboard. I don't need a fast action, but obviously I need higher action for slide. But I like a fight – I dig in – so those kinds of gauges feel right for me."

What does the immediate future hold for you now?

"This year will be a busy year of touring and there will be more music to come. Like I said, 2021 was a very heavy release year. Last year it was just five songs that came out as a little treat for everybody. So I think you can expect some new music to come along this year as well, without giving away too much..."

Ariel Posen's new album, *Mile End II*, is out 13 January on independent release
www.arielposen.com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GRETSCH
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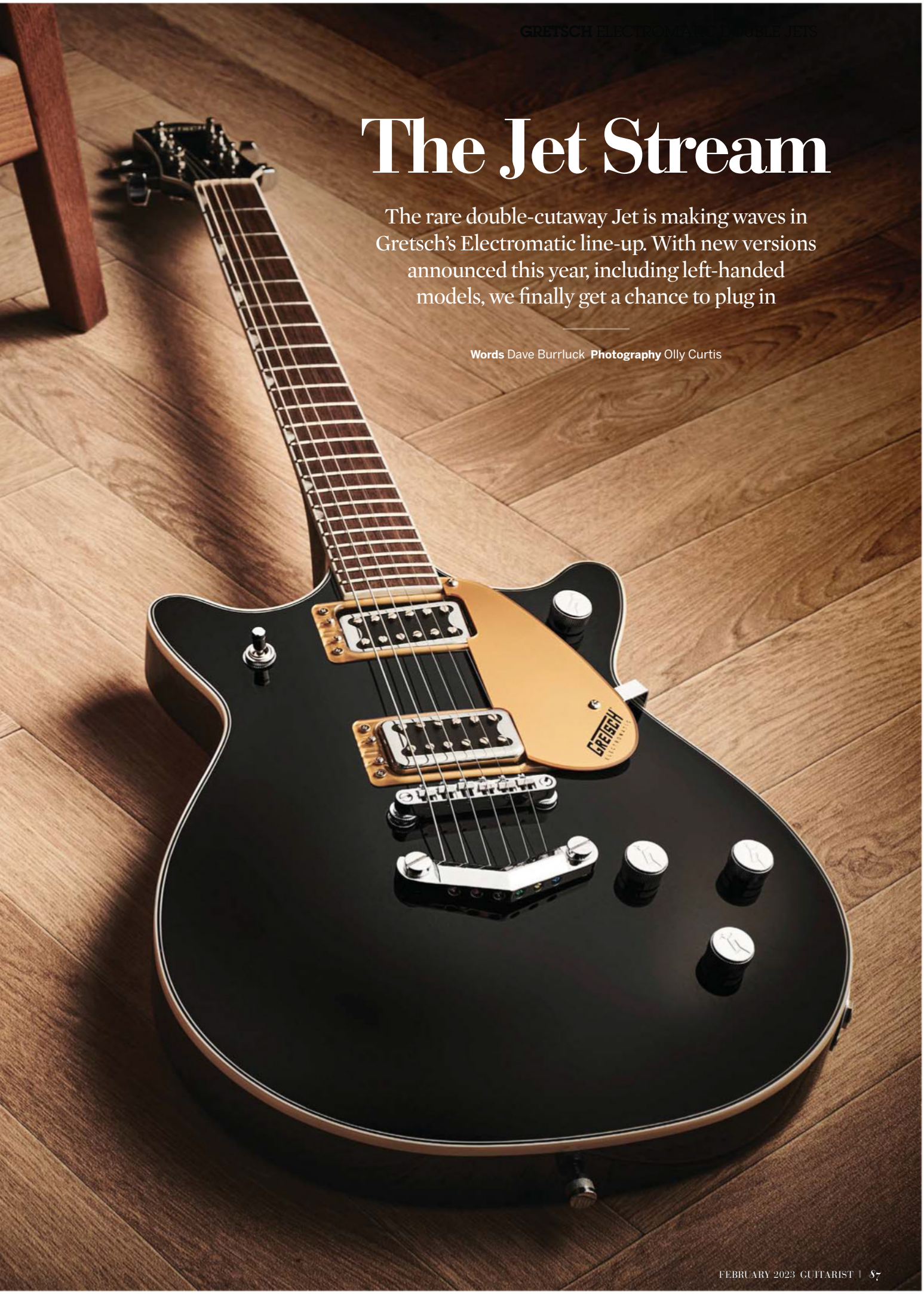
The Jet Stream

The rare double-cutaway Jet is making waves in Gretsch's Electromatic line-up. With new versions announced this year, including left-handed models, we finally get a chance to plug in

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis



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What You Need To Know

1 These are the Gretsches that AC/DC's Malcom Young made famous, aren't they?
Yes! The single-cut Jet was Gretsch's answer to the Gibson Les Paul; the Duo Jet first appeared in 1953. It was called a 'solidbody', although it was always chambered in terms of its body construction. By the early 60s – as with many Gretsch electrics – it had morphed into the double-cut shape we see here, as famously used by Malcom Young, mirroring Gibson's move from the single-cut Les Paul to the double-cut SG.

2 These are pretty affordable. Where are they made?
Both our Electromatic double-cut Jets are made in China. Gretsch's Streamliner range is made in Indonesia, while the Professional range is made in Japan. There's limited USA Custom Shop production, too.

3 Are the Broad'Tron pickups here the same as those used on the Streamliner models?
No, these are Black Top Broad'Trons, which were added to the Electromatics in 2020, slightly hotter versions of the Black Top Filter'Trons.

Yet another example of the escalating quality of Eastern Asian manufacturing, both of these Chinese-made double-cut Jet models are superbly put together. In fact, the only issues we had were from transit damage: guitars this good (irrespective of their price) need better packaging. But with our G5222's three-way toggle switch replaced and resoldered, there's not a hair out of place. So, what's the deal?

As you'll know, back when Gretsch's 'solidbodies' first appeared in the 50s, they used a chambered semi-solid design, despite looking like they were solid. It's the same deal today. The mahogany back is routed out leaving a central block under the pickups and bridge; the pickup routs are really deep (the bridge pickup's is 50mm, the neck's slightly less), while more wood is removed in the middle of that block.

The top, meanwhile, is solid maple, not a laminate like the originals, and overall both check in around 8lb. On both our models, the top is very cleanly edge-bound and nicely dished, violin-like, and the backs are completely flat with no contours. The rim depth is a little over 49mm; the overall depth is a very Les Paul-like 60mm. It does look smaller than the single-cut Jet, and

1

THE RIVALS

Epiphone's SG Standard '61 with Maestro Vibrola in Vintage Cherry (approx. £499) apes the original double-cut Gibson model: a primary reason why Gretsch introduced the double-cut Jet back in the day.

In terms of modern design, Yamaha's Revstar II guitars have a slightly bigger body (but still with that offset pointed horn style), plus some light chambering on the Standard and Professional models. For example, the twin-soapbar single coil RSS02T is £649, while the solidbody Elements start at £399.

Another original double-cut design is the slightly offset solidbody Reverend Reeves Gabrels Signature Dirtbike Royale (approx. £949), which comes with Mojotone soapbar single-coil pickups.

PRS's SE Starla (£710) is a single-cut, but the SE Starla pickups aim to give it a more Filter'Tron-like voice. The SE Custom 22 Semi-Hollow (£979) is chambered with regular SE 245 humbuckers.

2

there's less mass thanks to the mirroring of the treble cutaway and horn on the bass side. But, like the single-cut model, it's still pretty Les Paul-like with a 342mm (13.5-inch) width. Likewise with the scale length, which mirrors Gibson's actual scale at 625mm (24.6 inches). There's quite a chunky, full-depth heel here with a rather squared front, but access to the upper frets is certainly easier than a single-cut Les Paul, thanks in part to the double-cutaway.

The fingerboards are laurel and come across as pretty rosewood-like in colour, especially on our G5232T Bigsby model, albeit with a slightly more stripped grain, while the G5222's 'board is a little paler in colour that its review partner. We get well-installed, quite wide and low frets, which have been really well polished on both our samples, alongside those classy 'thumbnail' or 'half-moon' pearloid markers. The setups are good as well, although with nut widths just over 43mm, we'd say that the 34mm string spacing could certainly be widened.

1. There's no mention of Electromatic anywhere on the guitar, just that classic Gretsch logo on the headstock. The enclosed tuners are the same on both our models, although the buttons are larger on this G5222

2. This 'V' stop tailpiece is only available on the G5222 Double Jet. Both guitars feature the pretty generic tune-o-matic-style bridge, which Gretsch calls the Adjusto-Matic

Of course, the hardware is pretty generic, but we do get that proprietary 'V' stop tailpiece on our G5222, plus the chromed G-Arrow knobs and screw-on knurled-edge strap buttons. The plastic pickup rings and pickguard are colour-dependent, and those Gretsch-style pickup rings are really classy with nicely rounded edges. The pickups use three height-adjustment/fixing screws, which means you can tilt the pickups to directly match the sloping angle of the strings. You do need to remove the pickguard in order to adjust the height on the treble side of the neck pickup, but that's hardly a dealbreaker.

3. Our hardtail version uses these Black Top Broad'Tron pickups, although they appear identical to the Black Top Filter'Trons of the Bigsby version – there's no pickup ID on either, but the Broad'Trons have higher DCR readings

The Broad'Tron pickups on our G5222 could be called 'Filter'Tron Plus' – they add a little more power and grit

3

UNDER THE HOOD

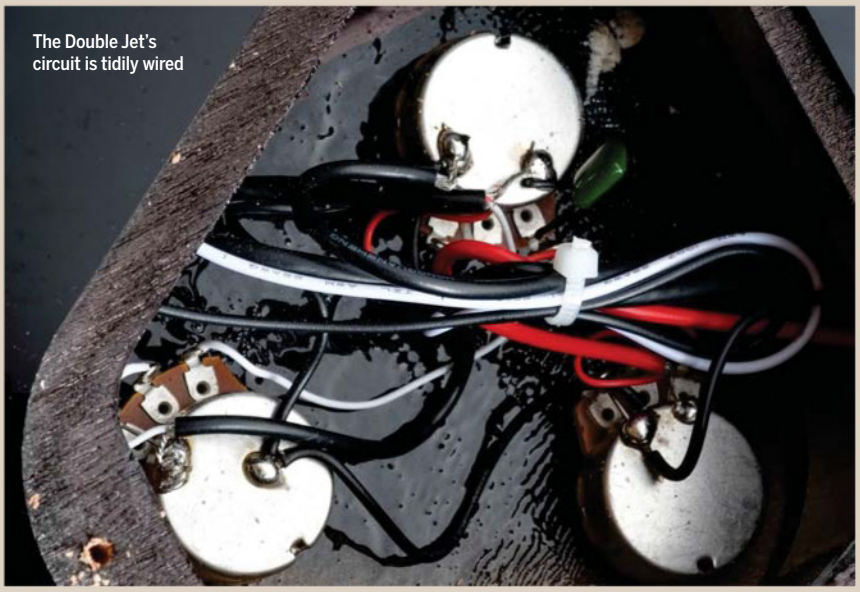
Gretsch is known for its sometimes rather complex control circuits. Let's see how these measure up

Gretsch calls it the "tone-pot circuit" and it certainly is one in the Electromatic and Streamliner ranges, if not the most commonly used of circuits. Here, we have a volume control for each pickup, a three-way toggle switch pickup selector, a master tone, and a *master* volume on the treble horn. There's nothing tricky in the actual wiring, though: it's all tidily done and uses unmarked but full-size B500k (linear taper) labelled volume pots, and an A500k (log or audio taper) tone control. Typically, audio taper pots are used for volume controls, occasionally linear. The tone cap is a standard small green mylar type with a 223J code meaning .022 microfarads.

Gretsch advertises a treble bleed circuit on this guitar, which is on the master volume control, not the individual pickup volume controls. Here, we have a small 250kohm resistor that's placed in series with a .0068 microfarads capacitor (682J), which is quite a high value for a treble bleed.

Pulling out the pickups, they have the familiar BHK sticker to signify Booheung, the giant Korean pickup maker that also makes the Streamliner pickups, plus plenty of other brands including Guild. There's no ID whatsoever, though. Gretsch doesn't tell us anything about the pickups, either. We do know that the Broad'Tron was introduced on the Streamliner series in 2016, as a full-size humbucker, and that these Black Top versions appeared in 2020 (there are also Professional series versions, too).

These Black Tops give a different look to the classic Filter'Tron – not dissimilar to the original single-coil Gretsch HiLo'Tron pickups, although these obviously have two rows of large slot-head screw polepieces and are humbuckers. The BT Filter'Trons' DCR ratings are pretty typical for the style at 4.35kohms (bridge) and 4.23k (neck); the Broad'Trons measure 5.22k (bridge) and 5.2k (neck) at output, which suggests they're hotter (at least that they have a little more wire in the coils) and that's certainly what we hear.



The Double Jet's circuit is tidily wired

Here's the treble bleed circuit on the master volume/a capacitor and a series-wired resistor. Simple!

With the BT Broad'Tron removed you can see that there's no formal pickup ID to be found here

4

As always, you'll need to stretch your strings well if you want the Bigbsy on the G5232T to come back perfectly in tune, but it is pretty good: light waggles held the tuning without adding any lubrication to the saddles. All in, a good job.

Feel & Sounds

Gretsch likes to use its 'Thin U' description of the neck shape, but in reality it's not particularly thin in depth nor 'U' shaped. We'd call it more of a shallow 'C'. Depth-wise, though, these are pretty mainstream necks, measuring 21.5mm at the 1st fret and just over 23mm by the 12th, very similar to the Streamliners we've tested and not dissimilar to Yamaha's Mk II Revstars. The frets measure around 2.64mm wide with a low-ish height of approximately 1mm. As we said, they're nicely installed and polished, and the ends sit over the binding. The action height came in as 1.3mm on both the treble and bass sides of our G5232T, and only slightly higher on the G5222.

Although the construction is a little different from the early 60s, our FT model sounds unmistakably Gretsch. It's not just the bright voicing; there's that subtle sparkle – almost like two single coils are blended together – and a little bark from the bridge that's contrasted by a choppy attack at the neck. Comparing the Filter'Tron-equipped G5232 with a set of TV Jones Classics (on a semi-hollow PRS S2), it does sound a little underpowered and

4. Over the years, the Jets have come with 'hump' block inlays or the thumbnail inlays we see here, originally a part of the grandly titled 'Neo-Classic' 'board. "Fingerboard for the perfectionist," ran the 50s ad copy, "Conservative beauty; classic fidelity; satin ebony feel; classical touch"

5. Very much a part of the Gretsch guitar, the master volume here uses a simple treble bleed circuit. At least we don't get a plethora of switches like on some Gretsch models!

The construction is a little different from the early 60s, but our FT model sounds unmistakably Gretsch

more polite, but the character is definitely there. It's certainly more of a single coil-y humbucker sound, evidenced by the Burstbuckers 1 and 2 on our Les Paul Classic, which might be considered clean and quite bright for a PAF-style but now sound bigger and louder compared with the Gretsch.

The Broad'Tron pickups on our G5222 could be called 'Filter'Tron Plus'. Irrespective of what is under the pickup covers, they add a little more power and grit, but seem to sit right between those Filter'Trons and the BurstBuckers in terms of output; they're actually closer in that regard to the TV Jones Classics. Already, we're thinking that a Broad'Tron at the bridge and a Filter'Tron at the neck might be our favourite, particularly with a little AC/DC crunch. There's a little more bark from the BroadTron's bridge pickup, but the neck loses a little clarity compared with that Filter'Tron.

You may wind all the controls full up and just leave 'em there, but that master volume is a great feature, especially when you're gigging. This is something of note on the

HIGH NUMBERS

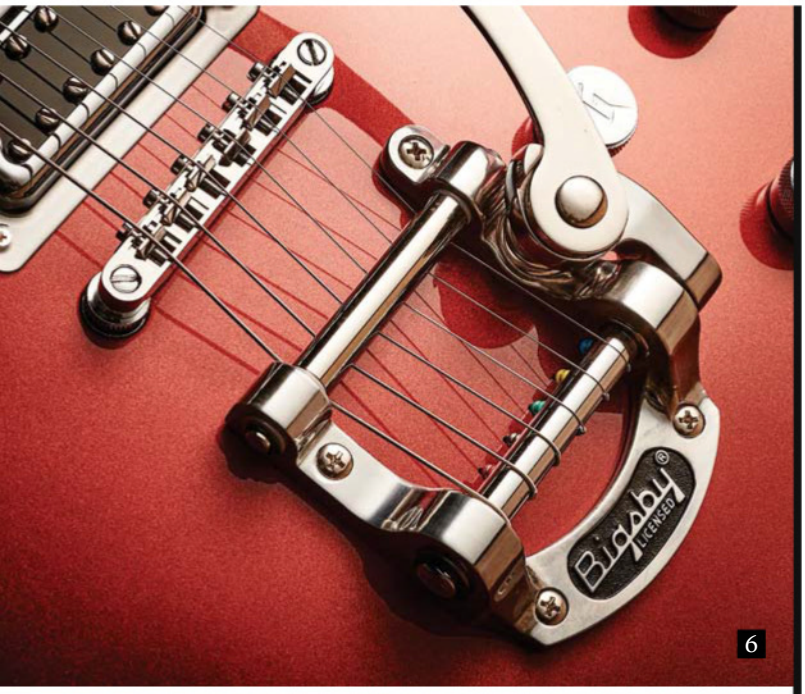
If you're not a Gretsch aficionado, you might be confused about the different model numbers, especially since they've changed over time. When the single-cut Duo Jet launched in 1953 its model number was 6128 and it came in black only. Each Jet variation had a different number, so, for example, the Silver Jet that launched in 1954 was the 6129, and the Jet Fire Bird with its red body front that launched in 1955 was designated the 6131. These numbers, seemingly, were retained when the double-cut versions appeared in 1961.

Today's Professional models pretty much follow those historic numbers. So the only non-signature double-cut Jet in the range is the G6131T-62 Vintage Select '62 Jet with Bigsby and it comes in Firebird Red only.

However, the four-number codes change for the Electromatic and Streamliner ranges: most obviously, the Electromatics start with a '5' and the Streamliners start with a '2'. But checking through the Gretsch catalogue archive on the website, in the 2006 catalogue the only Electromatic Double Jet (in a choice of Gold Sparkle, Black and Silver Sparkle tops) was the G5248T Double Jet with Bigsby. By 2008, this had changed: the G5248T referred to the Gold Sparkle model only, while the Black or Silver Sparkle-topped versions became the G5246T. Fast forward to 2013 and we now had the G5445T (Black) and the G5448T (Gold). The G5445T (Black) stayed for the 2015 line-up, but the G5441T (Firebird Red) was added. Another addition that year was the G5655T-CB centre-block Double Jet that used a full-length solid centre block and came in Black, Georgia Green and Rosa Red. By 2019 the G5445T (Black) and the G5441T (Firebird Red) were retained but now had chambered basswood bodies with maple tops.

Then, for 2020, the numbers changed again – apparently in an attempt by Gretsch to simplify the numbering system – and we have the G5222 we see today (but only in Jade Grey Metallic, Walnut Stain, London Grey and Aged Natural) and the G5232T (in Tahiti Red, Casino Gold, Midnight Sapphire and Dark Cherry Metallic). For 2022, new colours were added, along with those left-handed Double Jets, which just add an LH suffix to the model numbers.

Now, if we've got this right, the first number is the series, the second number is body construction, the third number is the pickup and the last number is the number of cutaways. So, for our review Jet models, the '5' is Electromatic, '2' means solidbody (a '4' would be hollowbody), '2', presumably, means Broad'Trons and '3' Filter'Trons, and the final '2' means two cutaways. Phew.



6. Bigsby vibratos and Gretsch guitars remain synonymous, and here we have a licensed B50 – signified by the 'T' (as in tremolo) at the end of the model number. The Adjusto-Matic bridge is pretty standard, though we found tuning stability very good after string stretching

vibrato model, where the arm gets in the way a bit of the individual pickup controls, but less so the lower master tone when the guitar is in playing position. While the treble bleed circuit on the master volume does keep things pretty bright as you pull it back, there is still a little extra sizzle when full up. The volume tapers do feel a little slow, too, but there's really nothing wrong here.

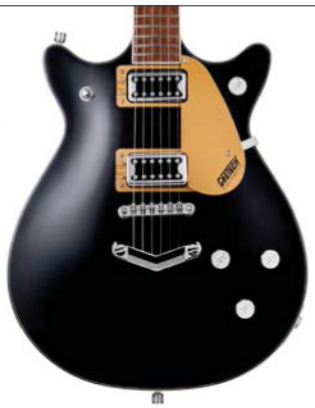
That said, the double-cut outline does mean the upper strap button moves out and more into the body than the single-cut Jet, and while that's not really an issue when you're playing away, we'd suggest a textured strap to prevent neck dive.

You may wind all the controls full up and just leave 'em there, but that master volume is a great feature, especially for gigging

Verdict

We can't help wondering whether brands such as Gretsch are shooting themselves in the foot. The high-quality build and finishing here is simply superb – regardless of the price – and there's really nothing wrong with any of the sounds we hear. Okay, we don't get gigbags, but not for the first time we found ourselves double-checking the prices, which are lower still in-store.

Electromatics have certainly found favour in the modding community, too, and you could use either of these as a basis for pickup, electronics and parts upgrades, but we have to say, as is, these are really fit for quite serious use. Cool guitars that won't break the bank. That's good enough for us.



GRETSCH G5222 ELECTROMATIC DOUBLE JET BT V-STOPTAIL

PRICE: £529
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Double-cut centre-blocked semi electric
BODY: Laminated maple top w/ laminated mahogany back, and sides w/spruce centre-block
NECK: Mahogany, Thin "U" profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 625mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/ 43.79mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound laurel, pearloid Neo-Classic Thumbnail inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Anchored Adjusto-Matic bridge, Gretsch 'V' stop tailpiece, die-cast tuners – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Black Top Broad'Tron humbuckers, 3-position pickup selector toggle switch, individual pickup volume controls, master tone and master volume (w/ treble-bleed)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.7/8.14
RANGE OPTIONS: See G5222 Electromatic Double Jet BT V-Stoptail
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, natural only, same price
FINISHES: Black (reviewed), Aged Natural, Jade Grey Metallic, Ocean Turquoise, Vintage White and Walnut Stain

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Excellent build, setup and playability; good weight; classic Gretsch style and slightly hotter sounds to match

CONS No gigbag; neck dive potential without textured strap

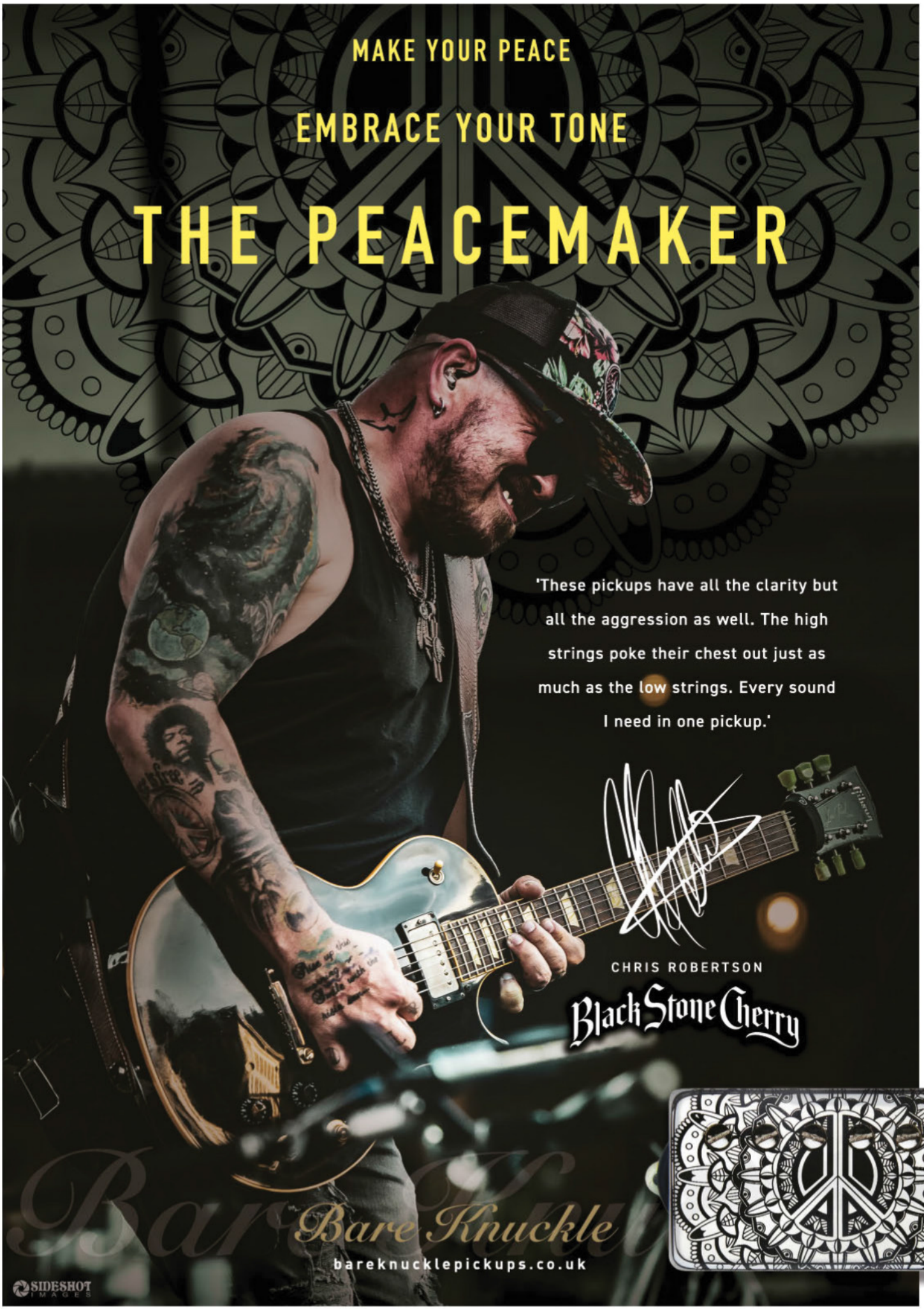
GRETSCH G5232T ELECTROMATIC DOUBLE JET FT WITH BIGSBY

PRICE: £589
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Double-cut semi-soild electric
BODY: Chambered mahogany with maple top
NECK: Mahogany, Thin "U" profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 625mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/ 43.65mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound laurel, pearloid Neo-Classic Thumbnail inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Anchored Adjusto-Matic bridge, Bigsby B50 vibrato tailpiece, die-cast tuners – chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Black Top Filter'Tron humbuckers, 3-position pickup selector toggle switch, individual pickup volume controls, master tone and master volume (w/ treble-bleed)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.62/7.96
RANGE OPTIONS: Professional range G6131T-62 Vintage Select '62 Jet with Bigsby (£2,929); new G6131G-MY-RB Limited Malcolm Young Signature Jet in Vintage Firebird Red (£3,179); later stripped version is celebrated with G6131-MY Malcom Young Signature Jet (£2,989)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, in Midnight Sapphire (with V Stoptail, same price)
FINISHES: Firestick Red (reviewed), Broadway Jade, Casino Gold, Dark Cherry Metallic, Fairlane Blue, Midnight Sapphire and Tahiti Red

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Excellent build, setup and playability; good weight; classic Gretsch style topped off with pretty classic Filter'Tron sounds

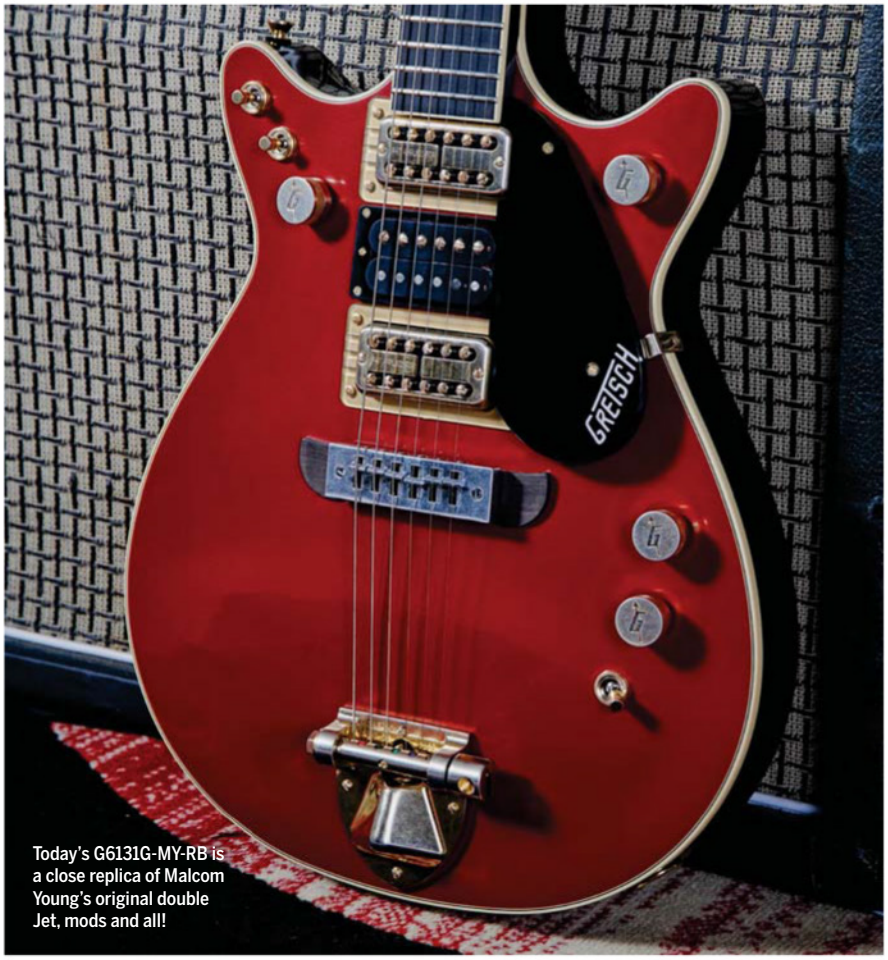
CONS No gigbag; neck dive potential without textured strap


MAKE YOUR PEACE
EMBRACE YOUR TONE
THE PEACEMAKER
'These pickups have all the clarity but all the aggression as well. The high strings poke their chest out just as much as the low strings. Every sound I need in one pickup.'
CHRIS ROBERTSON
Black Stone Cherry
Bare Knuckle
bareknucklepickups.co.uk
SIDESHOT IMAGES

Live Wire

The late Malcom Young was a champion of the double-cut Jet – and his famous modded Jet Firebird has just been released in its earlier, less-modded guise

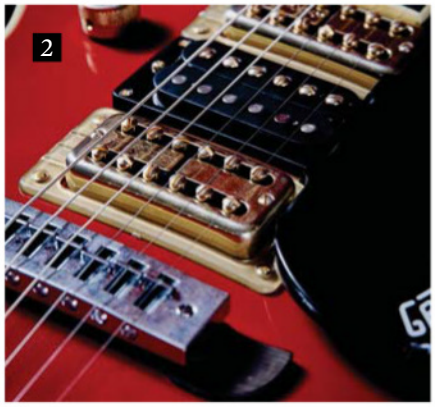
Words Dave Burrluck



Today's G6131G-MY-RB is a close replica of Malcom Young's original double Jet, mods and all!

1. Aside from the Firebird Red top colour, the back and sides, the neck-back and the headstock face are all black

2. TV Jones' Ray Butts Ful-Fidelity Filter'Tron pickups at bridge and neck with a Starwood 'bucker in between



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FENDER

While the current Professional series G6131T-62 Vintage Select '62 Jet with Bigsby is the closest that modern Gretsch gets to the 1961 to '69 double Jet, Malcom Young's 1963 guitar – nicknamed 'The Beast' – differed with its Burns vibrato, which was apparently used by Gretsch for a limited period when Bigsbys were in short supply. Among the early mods to the guitar was an added (Gibson) humbucker placed in the middle position between the two Filter'Trons and a Gibson 'harmonica'-style bridge – and that's the period that the new G6131G-MY-RB Limited Malcolm Young Signature Jet (£3,179) celebrates. Head over to YouTube to see the original in action, circa 1976, on AC/DC's original video for *It's a Long Way To The Top (If You Wanna Rock 'N' Roll)*.

His 'mid-modded' version formed the inspiration for the first Gretsch Malcom Young signature

Not long after, the guitar's top was stripped (the middle and neck pickups removed) and the Burns vibrato base replaced with a Leo Quan 'Badass' adjustable wrapover bridge. It's this mid-modded version that formed the inspiration for the first Gretsch Malcom Young signature (apparently offered from 1995 until 2009), and in the 2006 catalogue you can see it came in I (single-pickup) and II (twin-pickup) versions, and was available in Natural, Flame Maple and Red finishes.

Behind the scenes, from 2008, work had begun on producing a more detailed replica that was launched in January 2017 as the Gretsch Custom Shop 'Salute Jet' and reflected further changes to the Beast: the Burns-style vibrato tailpiece had been reinstalled along with a floating Gretsch bridge. The aged and relic'd Salute Jet is still listed on the Gretsch website at a cool $10,000, although we were informed that currently it's not available in the UK. But the considerably less expensive G6131-MY Malcom Young Signature Jet, at £2,989, is available, which apes the style albeit with no ageing or relicing.

www.gretschguitars.com

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Planets Suite

Three special instruments to celebrate 20 years since Faith became a name to reckon with on the acoustic front. Designed by Patrick James Eggle with bespoke abalone inlays they really are something to behold

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Olly Curtis

FAITH FG20RE MARS ELECTRO, FG20HCE EARTH CUTAWAY ELECTRO & FG20NCE NEPTUNE CUTAWAY ELECTRO £2,029, £2,099 & £2,109

CONTACT **Barnes & Mullins** PHONE **01691 652449** WEB **www.faithguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

1. **Hasn't Faith been around for more than 20 years?**
No, Faith is the brand name of UK distributor Barnes & Mullins, whose neighbour in Oswestry, Shropshire, is Patrick James Eggle. Though he switched to solely producing electrics, Pat's lasting gift to the acoustic world is that he also designs Faith instruments. This year marks 20 years of their collaboration.

2. **Look at that octave inlay!**
Sean de Burca is not only one of Faith's roster of musicians, he's also a talented artist and designed the exquisite tree-of-life inlay, hand-inlaid using abalone and mother-of-pearl.

3. **Are the tops of the guitars cedar?**
No, the colour comes from the process of 'torrefying' the Canadian Sitka spruce. The sonic effect of this slow roasting is said to be like playing a guitar that sounds like it's been bedded in for 20 years.

When Patrick James Eggle gave up building high-end acoustic guitars to concentrate on his fabulous electrics, close neighbour and longstanding UK musical instrument distributor Barnes & Mullins figured his fine range of flat-tops was just too good to consign to history. And so the Faith brand and also the Legacy Series were born. Based on various body sizes and styles that Patrick had devised, the Faith range was a runaway success, instantly placing the marque at the higher end of 'affordable' but with extra-classy looks, a great design ethic and an 'instant' pedigree that rivals might have killed for.

Two decades on from that meeting of minds we find a small but brilliantly reasoned range of anniversary models in the PJE Legacy Twenty Series. As with the original Legacy models, Faith has stuck to its seductive planetary theme with: the Mars, a drop-shouldered non-cutaway electro; the Earth, an OM-sized cutaway electro; and the Neptune, a baby jumbo cutaway electro. The three guitars feature identical timbers, plus Fishman's top-of-the-line Matrix Blend 'mic plus pickup and preamp' system that includes volume, tone and Blend controls, with a backlit tuner, all accessible via discrete shoulder-mounted controls.

As for those timbers we have bookmatched select solid Indian rosewood back and sides, a torrefied Canadian Sitka spruce top, Macassar ebony fingerboard, bridge, pickguard and headstock overlay, and mahogany neck; the bindings are figured koa. Necks are three-piece, with an added-on heel piece and the headstock scarfed on. These are really the only concessions to cost, but we applaud the saving of timber that this method affords.

Added to this feast of natural woody goodness there's also a healthy dose of seafood in the guise of green shell abalone hand-inlaid around the guitar's perimeter and soundhole, and the 'pièce de résistance' – a fabulous 'tree of life' inlay designed by

The design and build quality of this small but brilliantly reasoned range rivals anything out there

THE RIVALS

We've loved Taylor's recent revamps to the 500 Series, and the 517 Builder's Edition (£2,499) has a non-cutaway Grand Pacific body in tropical mahogany, with torrefied Sitka spruce top, ES2 pickup system and Andy Powers' V Class bracing.

Yamaha's A Series acoustics come in either Concert or Traditional Western cutaway body styles (both £1,499), in either mahogany or rosewood with attractive wood bindings and Acoustic Resonance Enhancement (ARE) tops. They also feature Yamaha's excellent SRT2 pickup/preamp system.

Furch guitars are made in the Czech Republic and represent both great value and super quality. The Yellow Series models come in a variety of body sizes with both cutaway and non-cutaway styles. The grand concert-size cutaway Master's Choice GC CR SPA (£1,980) features a solid Western red cedar top, solid Indian rosewood back and sides, African mahogany neck and ebony fingerboard and bridge with a LR Baggs StagePro Anthem pickup system.

1. The figured Macassar ebony pickguards on the three instruments have individual and attractive grain patterns, while the highly coloured abalone rosettes are very pretty

2. The heels are all two-piece, with added rosewood cap, the body binding is figured koa, and the back and sides are from solid East Indian rosewood

Faith artist Sean de Burca, with its trunk at the 12th fret, its canopy at the 11th, and its root branches at the 13th. Cleverly, the tree's crown is inlaid using bright green and pink abalone, while its trunk and roots are from contrasting white mother-of-pearl. It's a massively bold statement that some may find a touch over the top, but it's faultless in both concept and execution. However, if even more shell is your thing then look no further than the headstock, where you'll find the Faith logo in the aforementioned green abalone, and Eggle's own script signature in white pearl. Now, you can't say that's not one sumptuous feast!

With Eggle's ever-watchful eye always ready to spot shortcomings in build, fit, finish or playability, we're happy to report that he has nothing to worry about here. These guitars are flawlessly put together in Indonesia, their high-gloss polyurethane lacquered bodies and satin-finished necks are glitch-free, while fret laying and finishing are done to the highest standards. The tops have darkened to differing shades due to the roasting process, and the ebony fingerboards and bridges exhibit some attractive light graining – these small attributes also mean that the guitars aren't

simply 'cookie cutter' jobs but do exhibit individual personalities.

The bridge saddle and nut are both of natural bone, as are the abalone-inlaid bridge pins, while the Grover Deluxe tuners feature real ebony buttons – small details but ones that count when making your choice at checkout.

Feel & Sounds

Anything built from wood naturally wants to shrink, expand and shift in any number of ways. But modern facilities such as those of Barnes & Mullins' production partners in Indonesia, and the selection of properly seasoned and kiln-dried timbers, go a long way to ensuring stability in new instruments. So it is that the action on all three Twenty Series models is set all but identically, ensuring predictable playability across the range should you try one in your local dealer.

The necks themselves are an unobtrusive medium-sized C section that sit comfortably in the palm. Actions on all three are low and easy, their wide bone nuts offering plenty of chording space in the open position, with middle-of-the-neck barre chords easy to hold down. Both Earth and Neptune models feature soft cutaways, which, of course, facilitate improved access, so licks up to at least the 15th fret are perfectly viable.

Where each instrument might differ – and indeed what might turn your head to one particular model – is in body size (and cutaway or not, of course). The smallest OM-sized Earth is perhaps the most stage-friendly, with its smaller, shallower body making it ideal for upright performance. The drop-shouldered dreadnought Mars on the other hand is the bulkiest, and with no cutaway your upper-fret rock licks might have to be curtailed. That said, many players prefer the non-cutaway dreadnought look, and if upper-fret access is rarely required then this big, bold beast might be just the ticket. That leaves the mini-jumbo Neptune, the latest design in the Legacy Series and drawn by Patrick himself. On paper, and in reality, this is the perfect compromise between the two – a great sofa noodler that's ready to hit the stage when you are.

3. Our 'tree of life' inlay features purple, blue, green and pink abalone for the canopy, with white mother-of-pearl branches, trunk and roots. Stunning!

4. The Twenty's bridges are Macassar ebony, while their bridge saddles, fingerboard nuts and string pins are all natural bone, the latter being dot inlaid with abalone

The 'tree of life' inlay is a massively bold statement that's faultless in concept and execution

To sum up the three acoustically, it's exactly what you would expect. The smallest Earth provides the least top- or bottom-end but produces a focused middle that, while it can slightly veer towards 'boxy' when compared with the others, is probably the obvious fingerpicker of the trio. The dreadnought Mars model handles all you can throw at it, with strong bass tones, sweet highs and a slightly scooped middle. This balance makes it the perfect strummer (try a lighter pick), but also the light mids don't fight with a solo vocal, making it a fine singer-songwriter's tool.

Again, that leaves the Neptune, whose dreadnought-width body kicks out bass oomph and fat trebles but with perhaps a little less scooping in the mids. Played

5. These anniversary instruments are a feast of fine timbers, fabulous inlay work, and sumptuous bindings, all put together with real care and attention

6. If you wanted more natural materials look no further – abalone Faith logo, mother-of-pearl Eggle signature, and ebony tuner buttons

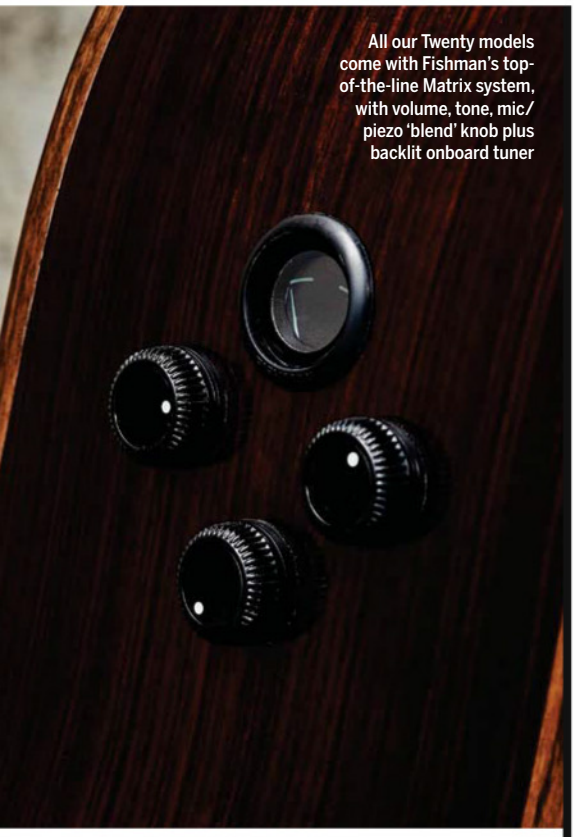
acoustically its perfect balance means it's probably our pick of the three.

Now, of course, these descriptions are a 'broad brushstroke' view, and one's style of playing and other external factors will make you prefer one sound over the other. And with all three looking spectacular in subtly different ways, in the end it could all come down to that. So no guitar here is the loser.

A quick mention of the electrics. We've tried Fishman's excellent Matrix in many different guitars, and the discrete condenser mic and under-saddle piezo pickup of the Flex M-Blend as fitted to all three guitars offers a superb range of sounds. The ability to blend mic and under-saddle pickup gives you the choice to tailor your exact tone, from brighter for an in-the-band mix, to more broad-shouldered for solo instrumental work, and a nice mix of the two for voice accompaniment. A general tone sweep pot (all controls are tidily housed on the upper bout) adds to the versatility, and a simple back-lit tuner completes a fine system that few pros would find wanting.

Verdict

When our late lamented, funny and talented writer Ed Mitchell reviewed the original Faith Legacy acoustics on which these Twenty models are based in 2018, he said: "Where the Legacy Series Earth is



All our Twenty models come with Fishman's top-of-the-line Matrix system, with volume, tone, mic/piezo 'blend' knob plus backlit onboard tuner

a fingerpicker's delight, the Mars is more of an all-rounder with a big voice and an impressive amount of depth and clarity." Regarding our Neptune (Ed only had the two) we'd simply add that its 'baby jumbo' body size sits bang in between the two, both physically and sonically.

It's very difficult to fault any of these guitars. Yes, compared with the big, open-sounding drop-shouldered Mars dreadnought, the smaller OM-sized cutaway Earth sounds more constricted, but by dint of that it's also perhaps more sonically focused, and on stage would certainly be a lot easier to throw around. The baby jumbo Neptune provides the perfect compromise – a great sofa noodler and a guitar that wouldn't disgrace itself down at the local open mic or under the gaze of a sold-out London Palladium.

Build-wise would we have preferred a non-scarfed headstock and one-piece heel? Of course, but then you're adding considerably to the guitars' price while not necessarily improving anything other than aesthetics.

Priced at around the two-grand mark, our Twentys find themselves in the serious league among some very big hitters. But with such great timbers, unique and intricate inlay work, a superb preamp system, plus design and build quality that rivals anything out there, we reckon they'd fend off most comers. So great instruments, and a fantastic Legacy, too. G

FAITH FG20RE PJE LEGACY MARS ELECTRO

PRICE: £2,029 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Non-cutaway drop shoulder dreadnought, electro-acoustic
TOP: Torrefied Canadian Sitka spruce with PJE designed X-bracing
BACK/SIDES: Solid premium Indian rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 120mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 405mm
NECK: Mahogany with scarfed headstock and 2-piece heel
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.6")
TUNERS: Grover Deluxe with ebony buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Unbleached bone/45mm
FINGERBOARD: Macassar ebony with 406mm (16") radius
FRETS: 21, medium
BRIDGE/SPACING: Bone/55mm (with bone bridge pins)
ELECTRICS: Fishman Matrix-T-Blend condenser mic with Matrix piezo pickup system
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.6/5.7
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: As reviewed
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Polyurethane natural gloss lacquer back, sides and top; polyurethane satin lacquer neck

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Beautifully built dreadnought with stunning looks; great materials and build; super-clear acoustic tones; professional onboard pickup/preamp system

CONS Nothing unless the three-piece neck bothers you

FAITH FG20HCE PJE LEGACY EARTH CUTAWAY ELECTRO

PRICE: £2,099 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Cutaway OM style electro-acoustic
TOP: Torrefied Canadian Sitka spruce with PJE designed X-bracing
BACK/SIDES: Solid premium Indian rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 112mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 383mm
NECK: Mahogany with scarfed-on headstock and 2-piece heel
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.6")
TUNERS: Grover Deluxe with ebony buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Unbleached bone/45mm
FINGERBOARD: Macassar ebony with 406mm (16") radius
FRETS: 21, medium
BRIDGE/SPACING: Bone/55mm (with bone bridge pins)
ELECTRICS: Fishman Matrix-T-Blend condenser mic with Matrix piezo pickup system
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.5/5.5
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: As reviewed
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Polyurethane natural gloss lacquer back, sides and top; polyurethane satin lacquer neck

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS A great-looking OM whose dimensions and cutaway make it a great stage guitar; the Earth is a fine acoustic fingerpicker, too

CONS As with the Mars, the three-piece neck, but only if it bothers you

FAITH FG20NCE PJE LEGACY NEPTUNE ELECTRO

PRICE: £2,109 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Cutaway, mini-jumbo, electro-acoustic
TOP: Torrefied Canadian Sitka spruce with PJE designed X-bracing
BACK/SIDES: Solid premium Indian rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 116mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 405mm
NECK: Mahogany with scarfed-on headstock and 2-piece heel
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.5")
TUNERS: Grover Deluxe
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/45mm
FINGERBOARD: Macassar ebony with 406.4mm (16") radius
FRETS: 21, medium
BRIDGE/SPACING: Bone/55mm (with bone bridge pins)
ELECTRICS: Fishman Matrix-T-Blend condenser mic with Matrix piezo pickup system
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.45/5.5
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: As reviewed
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Polyurethane natural gloss lacquer back, sides and top; polyurethane satin lacquer neck

Guitarist GOLD **10/10**

PROS Brilliant mini-jumbo; all the tone of a dreadnought with the punch of an OM; fabulous looks, build and playability; great stage-ready electrics

CONS The three-piece neck didn't bother us, hence a clean sweep across the board!

REAL PLUGIN

LA-STUDIO

REAL TUBE HEAD | Two notes AUDIO ENGINEERING | SUPERGROUP DESIGN

Laney BLACK COUNTRY CUSTOMS HANDCRAFTED IN THE UK Two notes AUDIO ENGINEERING

The Name Game

Known for the quality of its guitars, PRS may also be destined as a go-to brand for pedals with its intriguingly monikered debut trio

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

PRS HORSEMEAT, MARY CRIES & WIND THROUGH THE TREES £269, £229 & £369

CONTACT **PRS Europe** PHONE **01223 874301** WEB **www.prsguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

1. **As in *the* PRS? I thought they only made guitars...**
And amps, of course. But no pedals until now. These three are the Maryland brand's first foray into a rather different world.

2. **Why start now?**
Paul Reed Smith says the pedals idea came about when the musicians recording in his home studio were looking for tones and textures that they couldn't get straight from the guitar – and so they started building devices with the help of some friends. That led to the first pedal prototypes and the decision to offer them to more players.

3. **Just three pedals, though?**
There are possibly more to come. To quote Paul: "I think these first three designs are the start of something very cool"

Is it an inevitability that any large guitar company will release its own pedals? Fender's range has become well established, and Gibson recently relaunched its heritage Maestro brand. Now, PRS has got in on the act with three intriguingly named offerings – the Horsemeat Transparent Overdrive, Mary Cries Optical Compressor and Wind Through The Trees Dual Analog Flanger.

All three are designed and assembled in the US with a seemingly robust build quality. Each can run from a battery (accessed under the baseplate) or a nine-volt adaptor, and all are true bypass.

Horsemeat Transparent Overdrive

The Horsemeat squarely aims its name at the fabled Klon Centaur pedal. And a centaur, after all, is mainly horse! But the Horsemeat Transparent Overdrive is not a 'klone', rather it's another original circuit design with aspirations to reach that kind of status. Featuring germanium diodes and billed as a transparent overdrive, it has a typical drive pedal's Level and Gain knobs but has a little extra in the EQ department.

While Treble and Bass knobs with neutral positions at centre do the conventional, there's also a Voice knob that controls the frequency response in the clipping stage, and according to PRS, alters the feel as well as the tone (and that seems about right to us). This knob sets the upper-mid presence of the dirt: to the right it's a glassier sound, open and a little scooped in the midrange, and touch-sensitive, with pick attack coming through clearly. Rolling it back the other way smooths things out and fattens the midrange, losing a bit of that articulation.

There are no bad sounds, and the Treble and Bass knobs work really well in complementing the Voice to provide a balance of frequencies to perfectly suit your guitar and amp combination. At the lowest setting of the Gain knob, you can use the pedal as a boost anywhere from about 10 o'clock on the Level knob. But that Gain knob is there to be used and there's plenty of range; this is not a pedal that wants to be classed as low, medium or high gain. It does the lot and will change things up whether you're going into a clean or already driving amp. We have no beef with the Horsemeat: it's a versatile and eminently playable drive pedal with excellent amp-like sound.

1. The Voice knob on the Horsemeat pedal controls frequency response in the clipping stage – it's smoother and fatter to the left and glassier to the right

2

3

2. The top blue LED of the Mary Cries pedal shows when it is active or bypassed; the bottom one glows when compression is in place

3. The Dry/Wet knob of the Wind Through The Trees pedal controls the mix of your dry sound and the flanging effect from subtle shading to full-on

THE RIVALS

There are plenty of transparent overdrives and Klon 'klones' around that might act as alternatives for the Horsemeat, but the MXR Duke Of Tone (£179) is a really pedalboard-friendly source of decent drive tones. Like the Mary Cries, the valve-based Effectrode PC-2A (£269) is based on the LA-2A, but if you're looking for a more adjustable optical compressor, there's the Walrus Audio Mira (£249). While the Wind Through The Trees is quite unique, there are dual-engine modulation pedals available that let you combine modulation types – the Mooer Mod Factory Pro (£134) is one such example, and one of its combinations is flanger and analogue flanger in series or parallel.

Mary Cries Optical Compressor

There are certain compressors that all high-end recording studios simply must have in their racks, notably the UREI 1176 and the Teletronix LA-2A. Origin Effects based its much-respected Cali76 and SlideRig pedals on the 1176, but it's the LA-2A that's the inspiration for the PRS Mary Cries here, which has a similar minimalist control surface of just two knobs – one to set the output gain, the other to turn up the compression.

While this is a compressor, it also works as a clean boost by keeping the Compression knob at minimum and turning the Gain knob to anywhere above the unity gain point. As that's at nine o'clock, there's actually an awful lot of knob travel and extra gain available to be exploited – plenty to get any valve amp really cooking and to deliver crunchy drive.

As for the compression, well, it's really smooth and transparent, keeping a check on your signal without messing with your core tone. Those looking for squash and the shaping of the transient at the start of a note – like you might get with a Dynacomp-style compressor – won't find it here. This is more about tightening up the sound, endowing it with more note-to-note consistency and increased sustain. We see a great role for this pedal using a small amount of boost and a touch of compression as an always-on signal conditioner that will keep your natural tone but just improve it.

> Mary Cries has a lot of knob travel and extra gain to be exploited – plenty to get any valve amp cooking

Wind Through The Trees Dual Analog Flanger

PRS says its Wind Through the Trees dual flanger is best described as "two flangers fighting each other, resulting in a sound reminiscent of the wind whipping through the trees". Less poetically, it's two flangers (LFO 1 and LFO 2) working in parallel.

Both have Depth and Rate knobs plus a Manual knob that controls the delay time for each flanger, adjusting the character of the sound, with longer settings heading towards the blurred boundary between flanging and chorus. These two flangers are then blended via an LFO Mix knob, which offers equal amounts of each at its central 12 o'clock position but can offer a range of blends or simply one flanger or the other when fully clockwise or anti-clockwise.

Further to this, the flange signal can have regeneration applied, feeding some of its output back to its input, which can really up the intensity and the metallic sweep.

There's EQ in the form of the Added Highs knob – a function designed to add any high-end that may have been lost through the circuitry but, in practice, is a great general tone-shaper for the output. Finally, a Dry/Wet Mix knob runs through using the flanging subtly in a considered blend with the dry sound over to a full-on flange-fest.

Using just a single LFO, it's immediately obvious that the flanging here has a real classy sound and is capable of adding everything from a touch of hazy tonal dislocation through whooshes and warbles to swirling metallic textures.

The USP of the pedal, though, is using both together, which opens up whole new vistas – two flangers running at different rates or the texture created by different settings of the manual knobs can create some really interesting movement as they combine. With varying degrees of flanging, chorus and rotary speaker stylings yielding many sounds yet to be discovered, this is a fantastic source of a myriad of modulation sounds that sit brilliantly with guitar.

Verdict

PRS is a company that's generally regarded as classy and a little upmarket, and that's exactly how to describe its new series of pedals. These pedals are well thought out and designed to do a defined job – which each one does perfectly. And we hope there will be more to come.

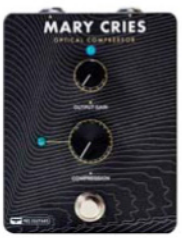
PRS HORSEMEAT TRANSPARENT OVERDRIVE

PRICE: £269
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Overdrive pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Gain, Level, Voice, Treble, Bass, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V Battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 16mA
DIMENSIONS: 93 (w) x 120 (d) x 56mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Sound quality; low-current operation for practical battery usage; logical knob layouts; powerful tonal shading

CONS The pedal's name won't appeal to everyone



PRS MARY CRIES OPTICAL COMPRESSOR

PRICE: £229
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Compressor pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Compression, Output Gain, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V Battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 8mA
DIMENSIONS: 93 (w) x 120 (d) x 56mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Sound quality; low-current operation for practical battery usage; logical knob layouts; smooth and transparent compression

CONS Could have been smaller for a two-knob pedal

PRS WIND THROUGH THE TREES DUAL ANALOG FLANGER

PRICE: £369
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Flanger pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: LFO 1 Manual, LFO1 Depth, LFO1 Rate, LFO 2 Manual, LFO 2 Depth, LFO2 Rate, LFO Fader, Wet/Dry Mix, Regen Rate, Added Highs, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V Battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 22mA
DIMENSIONS: 145 (w) x 122 (d) x 54mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Sound quality; low-current operation for practical battery usage; logical knob layouts; two blended flangers in one box; classy sounds

CONS Nothing of note

On the Wind Through The Trees, each LFO is an independent flanger that can be set differently and the Mix knob blends the two – both are at the same level at 12 o'clock

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MICK BOX

The Uriah Heep guitarist mourns the loss of a Telecaster and champions his signature Carparelli guitars

PHOTO BY DAVID CHARLES

What was the first serious guitar you bought with your own money?

"My first guitar was a Telston semi-acoustic that my mother bought me when I was 14, and which I've still got hanging on my office wall. It was from a pawnbroker and it cost £12 and 10 shillings in old money. Then I got a hire purchase agreement for a Telecaster, which is one of those that I wish I still had, but I had to exchange it for a Les Paul Black Beauty, which I had flown over from Kalamazoo to a shop in Bournemouth called Eddie Moors Music. And, really, that's the first one that I actually bought with my money because I took a job for a year in an export company up in the City of London. I said to my mother, 'Look, once I've paid off the HP agreement I'm going to be a professional musician for life.' And that's exactly what I did – paid it off in a year and on the last payment I went, 'Bye!' and never looked back."

What was the last guitar you bought?

"I'm in a very fortunate position where they give them to me! I don't think I've bought anything for ages. I mean, I've got sponsorship with guitar makers. At the moment I'm playing Carparelli guitars made by Mike Carparelli in Toronto, Canada. I take them on the road because I got fed up with taking out all my old Gibsons and things like that because they were getting battered. But these Carparellis are good – roadworthy, sound great, play great – so I use them and Furch acoustic guitars. They're beautiful guitars."

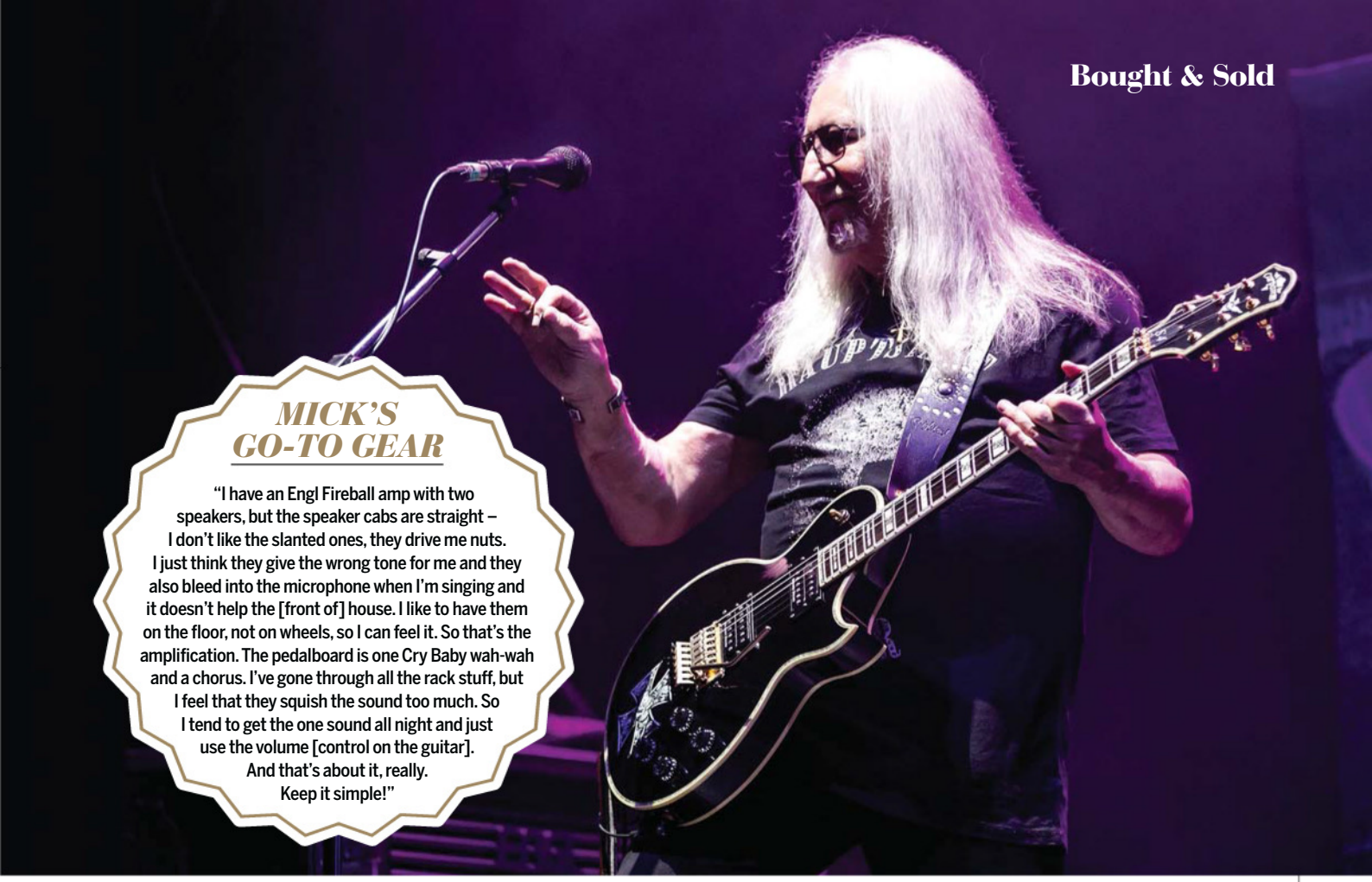
> "With a Hammond organ on the left, the bass, drums and everything's loud, you need something that will cut through"

What's the most incredible find or bargain you've ever had when buying guitars?

"I think there was a Les Paul Junior that was a bit of a steal. I bought it out in America, in a shop that didn't really understand the value of it. It didn't cost a fortune, probably $500 or something silly like that. Maybe that's the best deal I've had."

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've ever had after buying a guitar?

"Do you know what? I was given a Charvel guitar in the 80s. I'd heard other people playing them and I thought, 'Well, they look reasonably good,' and the company sent me one. I just couldn't get on with it, the neck was too fat, it just felt uncomfortable to play and even the look was a bit too modern for me. So I was kind of disappointed with that. I always keep going back to the Les Paul style. It's something



MICK'S GO-TO GEAR

"I have an Engl Fireball amp with two speakers, but the speaker cabs are straight – I don't like the slanted ones, they drive me nuts. I just think they give the wrong tone for me and they also bleed into the microphone when I'm singing and it doesn't help the [front of] house. I like to have them on the floor, not on wheels, so I can feel it. So that's the amplification. The pedalboard is one Cry Baby wah-wah and a chorus. I've gone through all the rack stuff, but I feel that they squish the sound too much. So I tend to get the one sound all night and just use the volume [control on the guitar]. And that's about it, really. Keep it simple!"

PHOTO BY DAVID CHARLES

that fits not only me but it fits the band. The only other guitar that I've tried that actually worked with the band was a Yamaha. They said, 'Come to the factory and choose whatever,' you know. They have a whole wall of guitars and they just left me in the room and said, 'Take your choice.' I picked out one in the medium [price] range, a Yamaha Pacifica. I said, 'You know what? This one suits me the best...' It's not all about price, it's about feel."

Have you ever sold a guitar that you now intensely regret letting go?

"That Telecaster that I once had. It was beautiful, sounded great. But I had to part-exchange it because I desperately wanted the Les Paul. That was kind of inspired by Les Paul himself. I used to listen to Les Paul and Mary Ford's records as much as I did Django Reinhardt, Tal Farlow and Barney Kessel. I was in that jazzy field at the time, and that's why I was leaning towards that.

"To be honest, I used to drool over Buddy Holly and the Sunburst Fender Stratocaster and I've got a beautiful one now. But it still doesn't work with the band for some reason. When you've got a Hammond organ on the left hand side, you've got the bass, drums and everything's loud, you need something that will cut through – and the Carparelli is marvellous at that."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"I've got a thing about this because I find that I go to many music shops and try X, Y or Z [guitars] and they're never really set up properly. They're hanging on the wall for weeks on end with not a lot of attention paid to them, but I think the setup is everything. I have quite small hands for a guitarist and I pick up most of these guitars and a great percentage of them are unplayable for me. But my advice is don't always look at the price, just find something that's comfortable to you, that feels good to you. Then get it set up, take it home and you'll be delighted."

When was the last time you stopped to stare in a guitar shop window or browse online and what were you looking at?

"I don't, really. I'm a little bit of an oddball like that. I'm quite happy with everything I've got. I do look at certain things every now and again, but you know, I don't salivate!"

If forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp, or a cheap guitar and a really top-notch amp?

"I'll take number one. Get the guitar right first and when you plug it in you can always make something out of it. But the guitar, if it's cheaply made you'll be chasing your tail to get it how you want it. With an amp you can always add something to it, like a pedal or something, and overdrive it and get some guts into it. So it's got to be number one."

If you could only use humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which would you choose and why?

"Humbuckers. I've just loved humbuckers since I got the first Gibson Les Paul Black Beauty. They have the guts, the power. I like what they give me as a player. The single coil, I find that I have to work with it a little bit. It's a really strange thing with guitarists; with me and my sound I can plug into a Fender Champ with something and it will sound like a Gibson in the end. I've got Seymour Duncan Jeff Beck pickups on every guitar that I use out on the road because you can interchange things; you don't want to start messing around with the controls on the amp to make it sound right. So I've got three Carparellis out on the road, all with Seymour Duncan JB pickups in." **[DM]**

Uriah Heap's new album, *Chaos & Colour*, is out on 27 January via Silver Lining Music
www.uriah-heep.com

Mick's Carparelli single-cut is a solid, dependable road-buddy – it lets him capture those LP-style sounds while his old Gibsons stay safe at home

The MOD SQUAD

ROUT ONE

With his StewMac kit-build all up and running, Dave Burrluck looks at how to populate that large pickup rout

Readers of this column will recall the 'Quick-ish Connect' system that I recently installed in that big 'swimming pool' rout, providing a versatile pickup-testing platform. And so the world is now my oyster – we do like a bit of choice in The Mod Squad, after all. Having been involved in a fair bit of recording over lockdown and out the other side, I seem to have been adopted as the guy that gets different sounds. In the early lockdown months, the first thing I did was borrow my mate's Rickenbacker 620 [pic 1]. I don't own one myself and never seem to be able to justify actually buying one, not least that their specific (peculiar?) feel and sound has never fitted into my usual bluesy, rocky gigs. But on the sort of song-based recordings I've been asked to contribute to, especially ones with those 60s-meets-90s Britpop sounds, *that* Rickie sound is addictive. I've relearned during these countless recordings, from wonky demos to finished masters, that different sounds and textures really work. I love my (mate's) Rickenbacker.

Another guitar that's had a lot of use is a 1968 Supro Stratford [pic 1]. Even after guitar maker Chris George had refixed the screw-on neck it's still a bit of a wonky

1 Neither this Rickenbacker 620 nor the '68 Supro Stratford have 'normal' pickups – but that's the appeal

"We're not creating a touring guitar. This is for sonic experiments and some inspiration for recording"

ol' ship, but the sounds it produces are glorious – those 'Vistatone' humbucking-sized single coils just evoke the 60s. The point is, these guitars have character, and that's what I need. But you don't need me to tell you this desire to be different can be seriously costly.

Pick A Pickup

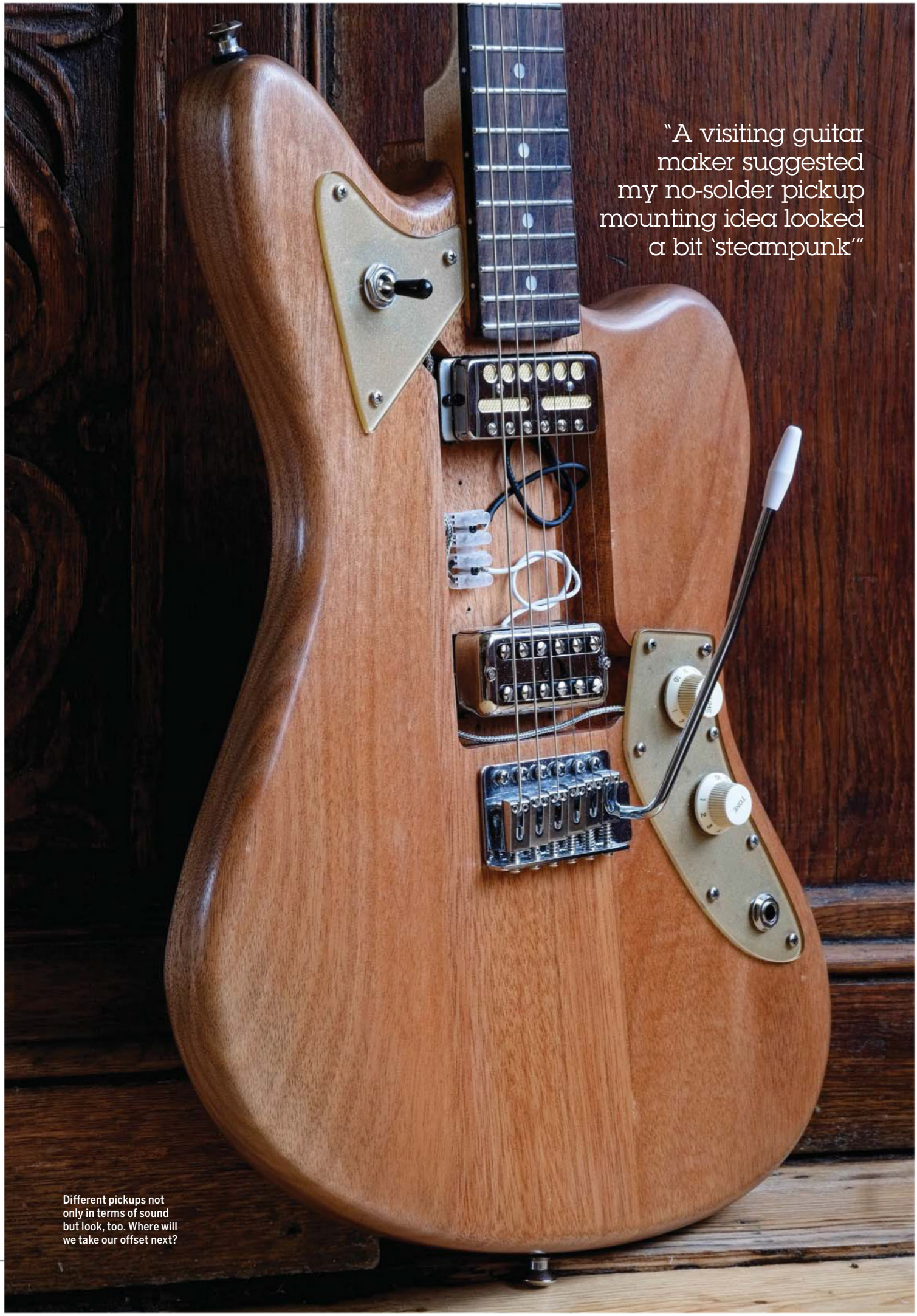
When I started putting together StewMac's Offset Trem kit back in issue 491, I honestly didn't think it'd feature in any recording plans. But even though it was barely finished, the two added Fender Jazzmaster pickups gave it a rather good voice – and one that I didn't have. And thanks to that open pickup rout, I realised I could fit virtually any pickup, so long as I could direct-mount them. All I need are some different pickups!

Online auction sites such as eBay and the like can really help, but the choice of something different – usually classed as 'other' in style on a pickup maker's website – are outweighed by the tsunami of mainstream choices: Strat and Tele-style single coils, Gibson-style humbuckers and P-90s, all of which I've got covered. Increasingly, though, even our homegrown UK pickup makers are producing more and more of these 'other'-style pickups – and in there I'll include Filter'Trons, Gold Foils, mini-humbuckers, Ricky style, not to mention Jazzmaster and Jaguar single coils and the Wide Range-style humbucker. A few of those makers might happily donate a set to The Mod Squad cause, most want to be paid for their work – and rightly so! All too soon my different dreams, even if we're just talking about different-style pickups, are also looking seriously costly. Hmm.

Set & Match

And then I stumble across Roswell pickups – the house brand of WSC, WooSung Chorus, a big player in the Korean manufacturing world – which are used extensively by Hartley Benton. They're pretty affordable, but lurking in the company's extensive range I find a Filter'Tron style and a Gold Foil, too, and I order one of each from DV247.com. The FLT-B-NI Filter'Tron Universal Mount costs £31, apparently uses an Alnico II

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK

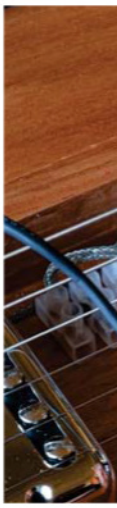


"A visiting guitar maker suggested my no-solder pickup mounting idea looked a bit 'steampunk'"

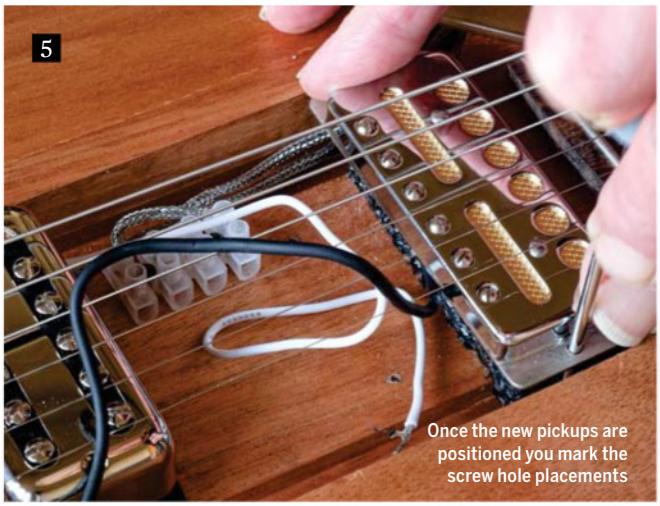
Different pickups not only in terms of sound but look, too. Where will we take our offset next?

Roswell Pickups is certainly serious about its packaging

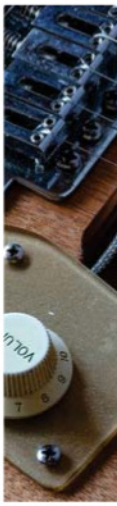
We had no idea what this 'set' would sound like, but they look good



All you need for this pickup swap are a few basic tools



Once the new pickups are positioned you mark the screw hole placements



magnet, and has a DCR of 4.8kohms, which is correct for the style. I'm presuming the other, the GF3H-N-CR Vintage Gold Foil, is a single coil. It's a little more expensive at £47 and advertises an Alnico V magnet and a DCR of around 6k. With shipping, I've paid £86 in total for my mismatched set.

As you can see, they're impressively packaged [pic 2] and include quite extensive (if general) pickup wiring diagrams, and they appear really tidily made; there's no 'Roswell' logo anywhere, either. Chatting to Trev Wilkinson about the background of the company, one thing he notes when I mention I have no idea what's actually under the hood is that "people hear what they see". I couldn't agree more. Now, I know what a Filter'Tron is *supposed* to sound like and I have some TV Jones' Classics as a reference, but Gold Foils? Err... Hey, they look good, don't they? [pic 3]

> "What does £86 of tone sound like? It's a game of two halves, probably with a bit of extra time"

I'd referred to my screw-in, no-solder pickup mounting idea as a bit 'Heath Robinson', but a visiting guitar maker suggested it looked a bit 'steampunk', which frankly sounds a bit cooler. Either way, a pickup swap is pretty easy: I slacken strings, undo the pickup mounting screws [pic 4] and the two screws-per-pickup in my Halfords junction box, and I'm ready to mount the new pickups.

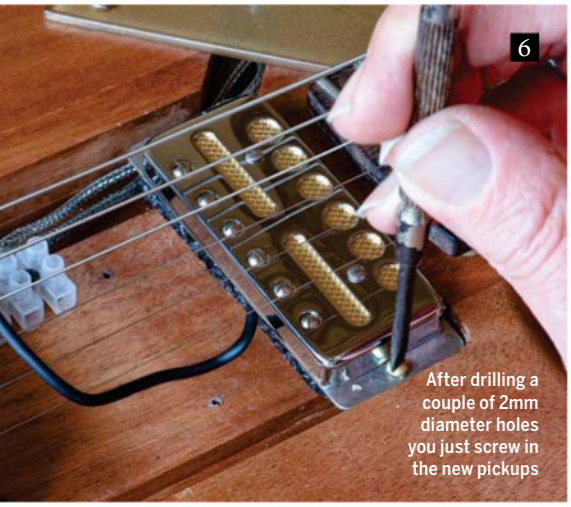
First, position the pickups. Bear in mind that they'll need some hard-ish foam to act as a cushion to get the pickup to the right height. Then mark the mounting holes with a thin diameter, sharp-pointed bradawl [pic 5] or lightly tap the mounting screws with a hammer. Drill the holes, add some dry lube and screw 'em down [pic 6]. You might need to prep the ends of the pickup leads. If so, cut to around 12mm and twist and tin (the only time you'll need a soldering iron). I've purposely left the pickup leads the original length so I neaten them up as best I can. To be honest, once mounted, these mismatched shiny plated pickups look a lot more, err, experimental [pic 7] than the previous larger Jazzmaster pickups I'd mounted. But don't forget – we're not creating a touring guitar here. This is for sonic experiments and hopefully some inspiration for recording.

Evaluation Time

So, what does £86 of tone sound like? Well, it's a game of two halves, probably with a bit of extra time. Listening clean and just tweaking the pickup levels for balance, these are actually quite matched in terms of output. The bridge Filter'Tron style sounds more like a low-output mini-humbucker than a real one, with less of that particular almost mixed dual single-coil sparkle. Referencing a TV Jones Classic (on a single-cut PRS S2 Semi-Hollow) I'm not a million miles away, but the Rosewell doesn't quite hit the nail on the head. It's far from a bad sound I'm hearing, not least if you're a mini-humbucker fan and like that narrow-aperture brightness. Like a Tele or a Les Paul Deluxe, it really cuts through a mix and provides immense jangle.

As much as I'd like to hear what a Lollar or Mojo Gold Foil would sound like on

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK



After drilling a couple of 2mm diameter holes you just screw in the new pickups

Heath Robinson or steampunk? We're ready to plug in

my experimental offset, the Roswell take is (again, starting clean) a bit low-output and rather jazzier than I'd expected. I'm not sure this one is quite right for those recording projects I'm working on until I start mucking about with my Line 6 Helix. I mistakenly call up a cranked Hi-Watt, and the Gold Foil sounds huge with some added level boost! With two very contrasting sounds, I wasn't expecting too much from the pickup mix, but the reason I like doing this stuff is because – and I should know by now – I'm always wrong. The mix here, particularly with a more sympathetic sound (cleaner Fender with oodles of reverb) sounds fantastic. There's depth and bounce, with a crisp but not overbright attack.

Final Thoughts

It's fair to say that if you think you're going to get a proper Filter'Tron and Gold Foil for £86, then, well, you're not. But if you're setting out to get a couple of nicely presented and good-sounding pickups that might throw you back quite a few decades in terms of the sounds they reference, we reckon you're more on track. Day job done, now back to my recording! G

HOW TO EVALUATE A PICKUP

The modern world is full of opinions. But when they're about the 'sound' of a pickup, should we believe them? While we evaluate plenty of pickups on guitars in our reviews and here in The Mod Squad, actually focusing on just the pickup, one part – albeit a very important part – of a guitar, isn't quite as easy. "But it's simple!" you say. "Just load 'em on a guitar and tell us what they sound like." Yes, obvious. Except what you're then hearing is how that pickup is translating the physical sound of the specific guitar you've loaded it on. You're always evaluating the pickup as part of the whole.

A good example is comparing a Les Paul with an SG, as we did a couple of issues back when we evaluated Gibson's latest Faded models. The Les Paul Standard 60s and the '61 SG both had effectively the same '61 Burstbucker pickups (and electronics), but did the guitars sound the same? No. Not to my ears, anyway. And that was after I'd diligently set the pickup heights the same on both guitars.

How many times have you read differing opinions on the same pickup sounds? We're probably all a bit guilty of it. It's all too easy to isolate the pickup when, in fact, you're expressing how you feel about the pickup as part of the whole. You might have had someone coming up to you after a gig complimenting your pickups. What about the guitar itself, the rest of your signal chain or – shock horror – the actual player?

A pickup is simply a transducer that, in basic terms, is a magnet and a lot of turns of wire. Its magnetic field is disturbed by the motion of the strings, which creates an electrical current that is then passed, typically, through your control circuit and then amplified. So, when those opinions say, "Pickup A is too bright or dark-sounding," how much of what that person is hearing is coming from the guitar itself, not least the strings – the pre-pickup energy and sound – and/or the post-pickup controls. And that's before we get to your guitar cable and its capacitance, and indeed your pedals or amplifier! All food for thought.

Huw Price's
Nitty Gritty

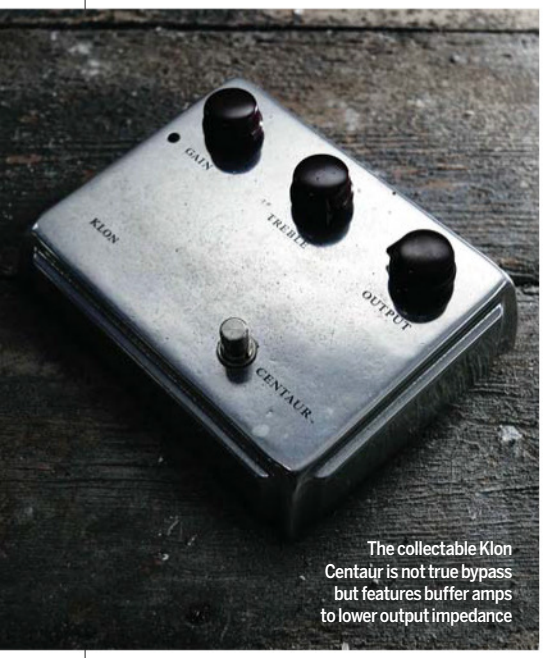
Huw explains how impedance issues affect guitar tone in a variety of scenarios

Impedance

The word 'impedance' is commonly used in the context of guitars, but how many of us understand what it actually means? In this issue's column, we'll steer clear of complicated equations and heavy electronics, and instead explore real-life scenarios.

Many of us will be familiar with speaker impedance and high-impedance instrument inputs on audio interfaces. Whether we're aware of it or not, impedance can be an issue when we're running long cables, using vintage amps, employing multiple stompboxes or combining fuzz and wah pedals. An understanding of how impedance affects the way items of equipment interface can help to get the best out of our gear and optimise tone. Once you're aware of the rules, they are simple and easy to follow. Let's start with a simplified explanation of what 'impedance' means.

Resistors are electronic components with a fixed value that restrict the flow of electrical energy by turning it into heat. Impedance has the symbol 'Z' and, like resistance, it's measured in ohms. But they are only the same thing in a purely resistive circuit. Adding pickup inductance and cable capacitance to the mix results in a reactive circuit, and that nominal impedance figure is not entirely constant across the entire frequency range.



The collectable Klon Centaur is not true bypass but features buffer amps to lower output impedance

Source & Load

The pickup is the source of the sound, and its resistive, capacitive and inductive elements combine to provide the source (output) impedance. The other end of the guitar cable plugs into an amplifier input, which provides the 'load' (input) impedance. The ratio of source and load impedance determines how much of the pickup signal reaches the first stage of amplification, and optimum guitar signal transfer depends on matching source impedance with higher load impedance.

The convention is that the load impedance should be at least 10 times greater than the source, but most high-level amp inputs provide a load impedance around 1M (1meg-ohm). When load impedance is too low, you may experience treble loss as well as a lack of sustain. If you examine the circuits of classic amplifiers such as Tweed Fender Deluxes (pictured opposite) and Gibson GA40s, you can see that the input wiring evolved. Owners often report that the later versions were 'hotter' when, in fact, the input stage was simply cooler and therefore wasted a large proportion of the guitar signal before it even reached the first valve grid.

Early guitar amps often had relatively low-impedance 'mixer' inputs for multiple instruments, rather than hi/lo inputs for an individual instrument. So called 'student' models like the Vox AC10 and Watkins Westminster were similarly stymied at the front-end and can be greatly improved by rewiring the inputs.

Combining Amps

Amplifiers are traditionally combined by daisy chaining the first amp's parallel input to a second amp's input using a guitar cable. Setting aside the ground loop issues that usually ensue, the guitar sees half the load impedance. This would usually represent a drop from 1meg-ohm to 500k.

The upshot is that neither amp will sound quite as good in tandem as it would on its own. Dedicated splitter boxes that can eliminate ground loops while maintaining the optimum impedance relationship are the best option for combining amps. And just for the record, disconnecting one of the amp's earth connections is a potentially dangerous workaround rather than a ground loop fix.

In The Long Run

All guitar cables are capacitive to some extent, and cable resistance and capacitance should ideally be as low as possible. You may enjoy the freedom to roam provided by long cables, but the longer the cable, the more likely you are to experience high frequency roll-off. If you have a naturally bright-sounding amp or guitar, the tone might benefit as a result, but many players tend to prefer cables that are as sonically 'transparent' as possible. Long cables are also more likely to pick up noise, which can further degrade the signal.

> Many of the revered pedals, such as the Tube Screamer and Klon Centaur, are not true bypass

If short guitar cables tend to be technically superior, how come microphone cables can be pretty much as long as you like with no loss of audio quality or intrusive noise? Again, the answer involves impedance, because microphones have a very low-output impedance – figures around 250ohms are typical. Microphone outputs are also balanced to eliminate unwanted noise, and we'll get onto that shortly.

Hitting The Buffer

Many boutique pedal builders make a great virtue out of true bypass on/off switching. The premise is that when the pedal is off, the guitar signal passes straight through to the amp without any loading or losses through the pedal circuitry. Compared with 'tone sucking' circuits like the early Cry Baby wah, this is undoubtedly the better option.

The idea has a superficial appeal until you consider the length of the cable between the guitar and pedal, then double it to connect the pedal to the amp. Increasing cable length increases resistance and capacitance, which translates to more treble less.

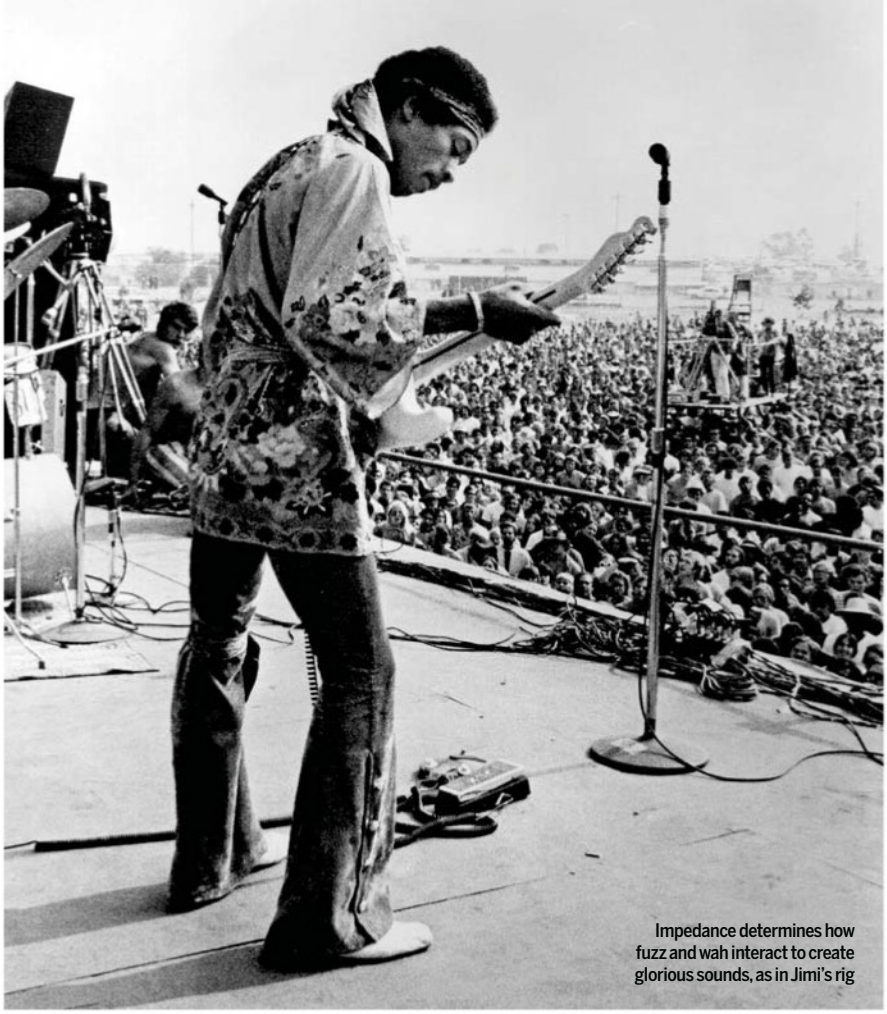
Many of the most revered and collectable pedals are not true bypass, with the Ibanez Tube Screamer, Klon Centaur and all Boss pedals being classic examples. Instead, these pedals feature buffer amplifiers that remain in the signal path even when the

The evolution of amps such as this Fender Tweed Deluxe shows how impedance has a crucial role in tone-forming

pedal is turned off. These little buffer amps are not designed to boost the signal, though. Their actual purpose is to lower output impedance and improve signal transfer through long cable runs with minimal treble loss. You may also notice that treble roll-off is less apparent when you turn down your guitar's volume control.

In addition to buffered effects pedals, there are plenty of standalone buffers that can be used early in the signal chain or at the output end of a pedalboard. Of course, in this instance much depends on the buffer amp's audio quality, and inferior designs may introduce unwanted noise or distortion. True bypass versus buffering is a complex topic, but the bottom line is that you'll need a low impedance buffer somewhere along the line if you want to retain audio fidelity with long cable runs and expansive pedalboards.

The guitar equivalent of the chicken and egg question is: which should come first, the fuzz or the wah?



Impedance determines how fuzz and wah interact to create glorious sounds, as in Jimi's rig

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Alternatively, consider low-impedance pickups. Players who appreciate clear high-fidelity tone often graduate towards active pickup systems such as EMG and Fishman. Onboard preamps boost the output and lower the impedance for efficient signal transfer with the widest frequency range.

Fuzz & Wah

Vintage-correct germanium Fuzz Face derived circuits have low-input impedance and prefer to see a guitar pickup at the other end of the cable. With a buffer in front, they can sound shrill, thin and edgy. In contrast, fuzzboxes like Big Muffs have a higher-input impedance and are far less fussy about positioning on a pedalboard.

The guitar equivalent of the chicken and egg question is: which should come first, the fuzz or the wah? And the answer is that much depends on the fuzz itself, but the wah's frequency sweep is reduced when a Fuzz Face is used post-wah. This is because traditional Vox/Cry Baby wah circuits have relatively high-output impedance. The solution is to retrofit an output buffer to the wah, but this buffer must be integral to the wah circuit, and both the wah and buffer have to be truly bypassed when the wah is switched off. The buffer makes the fuzz happier, restores the wah's sweep range and rounds out the tone.

You can put the fuzz before the wah, too, and the wah will sound fine. But since the wah is a sweepable bandpass filter, the fuzz's frequency range will be restricted and it will sound far less fuzzy and harmonically complex. Even so, plenty of players prefer it that way, so tone-suck it and see.

Reverse DI Trick

It's often necessary for the amplifier and player to be in separate rooms when recording. Using a couple of DI boxes, it's possible to run very long cables with minimal losses and no added noise. Like buffers, DI (direct inject) boxes convert impedance from high to low, and they're used to interface passive electric guitars and basses with microphone preamps that typically have lower-input impedance than amplifiers. They also have a balanced output and many are passive devices with an onboard transformer.

Plug your guitar into the first DI box and connect a microphone cable to the output that's long enough to reach the amplifier. There will be a male XLR at the amplifier end, so you'll need a female-to-female XLR converter or a short length of microphone cable with female XLR plugs at each end to plug into the XLR output of the second DI box. A short length of guitar cable or a patch cable then connects the second DI box's input to the amplifier's input.

The first DI box lowers the impedance and balances the output. The second DI box, which is connected in reverse, debalances and resets the impedance. An active DI box can be used at the front, but you'll need a passive DI box for reverse operation.

Reamping

Finally, let's look at reamping. In a nutshell, reamping is a process that involves recording a clean DI signal from a guitar or bass, and later sending it from a DAW and audio interface to an amplifier to be re-recorded using microphones. This has become a standard production technique and the results can be excellent – so long as you observe the impedance rules.

The audio interface will have a balanced output with an impedance around 600ohms – and that's not what the amp wants to see at all. By debalancing the signal and presenting the amp with a source impedance that's equivalent to a pickup, reamping boxes trick amps into thinking they're interfaced directly with a guitar.

Some more sophisticated reamping boxes available on the market have impedance and level controls to ensure that the frequency response sounds natural and the amplifier's input isn't overloaded. These offerings also enable you to avoid ground loops, and some even provide adjustable impedance controls and treble roll-off to simulate cable capacitance.

That's all for this issue. We're aware that we didn't mention speaker impedance here as this was discussed recently in Paul Gough's Talking Loud column (issue 491). You're always best off simply matching the amp's output impedance to the speaker impedance. But hopefully this articale has answered some questions and inspired you to try out some new things. G

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Guitarist

Measure Up

Once dismissed as the preserve of bass players, 10- and 15-inch speakers have a valid place in guitarists' amps, says Paul Gough of Zilla Cabs

We're all used to seeing and hearing 12-inch speakers (drivers) in guitar combos and cabinets, but these days 15s are quite rare to find and 10s can often wrongly be considered as cheap alternatives to their big brother the 12. In this article we're going to have a brief look into situations where these speakers can really work.

Ironically, I seem to spend as much time trying to convince bassists that 12-inch bass speakers can sound great as I do pointing out to guitarists that there are other sized speakers than the usual 12s. Maybe we have become so familiar with seeing 8x10s, 4x10s and 1x15 cabs behind bass players that we have forgotten how common it was to see 4x12 rigs being used by bassists the world over. Perhaps it was the simplicity of these rigs that made us see 10s and 15s as a more progressive solution. This could be the reason that we guitarists have come to focus on the 12-inch format, a reaction of sorts to 12s not being for bass. Jim Marshall making the first 4x12s in the early 1960s surely had a big impact on guitarists, too, but let's not forget how common it was to see 10- and 15-inch speakers in early combos and, crucially, how good those amps sounded.

I'm going to get a little technical here, while at the same time potentially upsetting speaker builders with my simplicity... but there are a few parts of the speaker that will make it more or less suitable for specific jobs. A larger dust cap (the small dome on the speaker cone, visible from the front) usually results in more low-end, which is why a bass speaker can look quite different to a vintage speaker from the front. A vintage-styled 10-inch guitar speaker will also usually have a smaller voice coil, often resulting in a brighter sound, so not always so great for higher gain or bass heavy sounds. You can probably guess that a 15-inch speaker can support larger components, changing its voicing further, but these haven't been as well adopted by guitarists as the 12.

We've talked before about how early guitar amps were often limited by power and the large part that the available speakers played in this. Well, the rule of thumb back then was that 12s could handle more power than 10s, and 15s could handle more than 12s. In the late 50s when Leo Fender was developing his most powerful amp yet, the Showman, he opted for the 15-inch JBL D130, a legendary speaker and one that could handle far more than the Jensen P15N that was readily used at the time. It was this amp that allegedly nearly deafened Leo Fender and yet it also paved the way for more powerful amps. It must be said that the Showman was also available with a 12-inch JBL D120, but it is the 15-inch version that was made famous by players such a Dick Dale, Peter Green and others (Jimi Hendrix had one, too). Maybe the best example of how great 10- and 15-inch speakers can sound and how readily they were used is the Fender Bassman, starting life in the early 50s as a 1x15 combo and later using the 4x10 format that most of us are more familiar with.

These 10- and 15-inch speakers (clockwise from left: ElectroVoice EVM15B, Celestion Creamback and vintage Jensen 10) are a great option for guitarists

Beyond Vintage

Obviously, these are all vintage amps and therefore produce more vintage sounds, but there are plenty of modern amps that use both 10 and 15 speakers. The Mesa/Boogie Lone Star came in an amazing-sounding yet rare 4x10 variant. I made myself a 1x15 version, which is one of my favourite amps, but it is true that the 2x12 version was far more popular with players. Marshall made a small number of 4x10 Bluesbreaker combos in the 60s and its 8x10 guitar cabs of the 1970s are much sought after, although rare (again) and not exactly recent. Matchless, Dr Z, Mesa/Boogie, Vox and many others have made amps and cabs with 10-inch speakers, but these have never really been voiced with more heavily distorted tones in mind.

To summarise, it's fair to say that 10-inch guitar speakers do tend to sound a smidge thinner with a mildly limited low-end response, but this is partly due to how manufacturers have styled them, catering for a more vintage market. 15-inch speakers have been largely ignored, possibly due to their size and not being the only higher powered alternative, further limiting their appeal and availability. But both variants definitely have their place, and the good news is – according to Ignazio Vagnone of Jensen and backed up by my own experience – both are receiving a small but welcome comeback.

This wicker grilled Fender Vibrosonic is fitted with a JBL D130 15-inch speaker inside

"Let's not forget how common it was to see 10- and 15-inch speakers in early combos and, crucially, how good those amps sounded"

PHOTOCOURTESY OF ZILLACABS

Rod Brakes' Classic Gear

Gibson's supersize acoustic has always been the "king of flat-tops"

Gibson SJ-200

Gibson's SJ-200 acoustic guitar first appeared in the 1930s. Around this time, Gibson and Epiphone were going head to head in a size war – each trying to outdo the other under the premise 'bigger is better' while equating instrument dimensions with power, projection and, ultimately, status. This spirit of competition led to several developments, notably Gibson's 18-inch-wide Super 400 and Epiphone's 18½-inch-wide Emperor. These supersize archtops were deemed flagship models, and both sat at the top of their respective price lists with a $400 tag. Along with the Super 400, Gibson unveiled its Jumbo flat-top (named after the colossal elephant) in 1934 in order to compete directly with Martin's large-body Dreadnought design (named after the gigantic battleship). Also in '34, Gibson's seminal L-5 archtop (which celebrates its 100th anniversary this year) was "Advanced" from 16 to 17 inches in width.

It was only a matter of time before Gibson introduced a supersize flat-top with the kind of ornamentation that set its leading archtops apart, and the SJ-200 took many of its cues from the Advanced L-5. In fact, from its 1937 debut, early examples of the SJ-200 were labelled "L-5 Spec". As well as having a similar body shape and size, the SJ-200 sports an L-5-style bound, pointed fingerboard. Along with fancy inlays and multiple-ply body binding the similarities are clear. The most famous of these early custom-order prototype guitars belonged to 'singing cowboy' Ray Whitley. The bygone era of singing cowboys was a Hollywood phenomenon, and Gibson jumped at the chance to supply a rapidly growing demand among the celebrities of the day. Gene Autry, Ray 'Crash' Corrigan, Jimmy Wakely and other cowboy movie stars all appeared with Gibson's "king of the flat-tops". And with silver screen endorsements of such calibre, the instrument soon gained iconic status.

First appearing in Gibson's 1938 catalogue, the $200 "Super Jumbo" was renamed the Super Jumbo 200 (hence SJ-200) by the following year. After the war, it was advertised simply as the J-200 but continued to be labelled "SJ-200" well into the 1950s. Consequently, either name is used to refer to the same model. And though the rounder-bodied S/J-200, J-180 and J-185 guitars are often dubbed Jumbos exclusively, many Dreadnought-style Gibson flat-top models are also, strictly speaking, Jumbos (J-45, J-50, J-55 et cetera). Additionally, it's worth noting the 'S' designation should not be confused with the Gibson SJ/Southerner Jumbo/Southern Jumbo.

> Gibson introduced a supersize flat-top in the 30s with ornamentation that set its leading archtops apart

The singing cowboys may have helped popularise the SJ-200 in the beginning, but the model is perhaps better known as an instrument of choice for the likes of the Everly Brothers, Elvis Presley, Tom Petty, Orianthi, Bob Dylan and Pete Townshend – all of whom have been honoured by Gibson with signature models. Emmylou Harris, too, is an SJ-200 devotee. The Grammy-winning acoustic legend even custom-ordered a guitar from Gibson based on her ex-Gram Parsons SJ-200. She also collaborated on a unique signature model – the L-200 – that features a reduced width of 15 inches. Similarly, players who think the SJ-200's 17-inch width is a bit too much might find the smaller J-180/Everly Brothers and J-185 guitars more comfortable to play.

Truly a top-of-the-line instrument, it's hard to find a better example of bookmatched high-grade maple than this

The Evolution of the Gibson SJ-200

1937
L-5-style custom-order instrument presented to Ray Whitley

1938
Advertised in catalogue as "Super Jumbo" priced $200; sunburst finish; rosewood back/sides

1939
Renamed Super Jumbo 200; mahogany Super Jumbo 100 released ($100)

1941
Ebony fingerboard changes to rosewood

1942
Double X-bracing changes to single X-bracing

1947
Advertised as J-200; maple back/sides

1948
Natural finish available (J-200N)

1961
'Closed'/Tune-o-matic bridge replaces 'open' bridge with non-adjustable saddle

1970s
Dove-style bridge with non-adjustable saddle; double X-bracing

Current
Several SJ-200 models in Original, Modern, Artist and Custom Shop Collections

1953 Gibson J-200N

1. SERIAL NUMBER
'A'-prefixed five-digit serial number inked on oval orange soundhole label

2. HEADSTOCK
Bound; mother-of-pearl Gibson logo and 'crown' motif; black nitrocellulose finish (face and rear) with 'bee sting' taper

3. HARDWARE
Gold-plated Kluson Deluxe tuners; rosewood 'moustache' bridge with four pearl ribbon inlays; non-adjustable saddle

4. NECK
25½-inch scale length; laminated figured maple; bound 20-fret pointed rosewood fingerboard with mother-of-pearl 'crest'/'cloud'/'pineapple' inlays

5. BODY
17 inches wide; spruce top with seven-ply (b/w) binding; figured maple rim; two-piece figured maple back with five-ply (b/w) binding and 'zipper' centre stripe; seven- and three-ply (b/w) soundhole rings; Natural finish

6. PLASTICS
White bridge pins; white keystone tuner buttons; engraved celluloid pickguard; black/white 'bell' truss rod cover; three-ply (b/w) heel cap

PHOTO BY JOLLY CURTIS

David Davidson's Vintage Icons

Gibson's hybrid electric features six- and 12-string necks

'57 Gibson EDS-1275 Double 12 *Prototype*

This ultra-rare double-necked model debuted alongside the Double Mandolin

"This is a pretty neat guitar. I stumbled across it almost by accident, but it has an amazing story. This is a prototype from '57, with no serial number. It's an EDS-1275 hollowbody with a spruce top. It has a Polaris White finish and features a six-string neck and a 12-string neck. It has four PAF humbucking pickups and switchable necks. It's not so much that it's different from the regular production guitars – more that this is likely the one pictured at the 1957 Chicago NAMM Show.

"The original owner (I bought it from her son) was Jeanette Dixie Lee Fogel, and she was in a band called Dixie Lee and the Rhythm Ramblers. She got to play this double-necked Gibson after her husband backed over her Kay guitar and amplifier with his station wagon. He destroyed the instrument completely, so he went running out looking for a new guitar. This is all documented in letters from two of her sons.

"Dixie Lee was a big fan of The Collins Kids and Joe Maphis and liked the idea of having a double-necked guitar. So they went to order one and were surprised when it showed up at the music store less than a week later. They couldn't understand how Gibson made it so fast. Normally, it would have taken weeks. We can only conclude the guitar was already made. They thought they were going to have a custom-made guitar, and normally it would have taken way longer. But Gibson already had this EDS-1275 Double 12 built. They just needed to box it up and ship it. My reasoning is that after they had it at the NAMM Show, the order came in and they just decided to pack it up and send it out immediately.

"She played with different people like Little Jimmy Dickens, Billy Grammer, Stoney Cooper, Clyde Moody, Leon Rhodes and Larry Collins. So she was a pretty happening player and singer. She passed away in 1968, and after the guitar ended up with her family, they relocated from Charleston, South Carolina, to Nichols, South Carolina. The oldest brother, Harold, had become the caretaker of the instrument, and when his father died the sons made a decision to find the guitar a new home. I remember the phone call.

> "Dixie Lee was a big fan of Joe Maphis and liked the idea of a double-necked guitar"

"They called me in 2016 and told me the story. Harold said, 'We used to have famous musicians at the house all the time when we were little boys – Joe Maphis and all these other people like Jimmy Bryant. It was a big deal and it's a special guitar.' But then he told me there was no serial number on it and I was like, 'Wow I've not seen a 1275 without a serial number.' But having dealt with a lot of rare guitars I know that many early first-edition Gibsons were not serial numbered. This is because they weren't sure if they wanted to sell them to the public. Interestingly, 1952 Les Paul Goldtops weren't serial numbered, either.

"This guitar is in immaculate condition except the tuner buttons had shrunk to virtually nothing. When I got it, I put period-correct repro Kluson tuners on so that it was a usable instrument. The originals are in the case. It has the original case. It looks like an Explorer case – a large, rectangular brown type with a pink lining.

"I've seen a lot of double-necks in the past and I have a lot of double-necks now because I built a collection of different types for the Songbirds museum. Now, I have many of them back, although I've sold some recently. Slash just bought a black one and the only cherry-red one that was ever made. (He posted it on Instagram, so people can see it on there.) But this guitar is very special, too. I mean, I've never seen another one with no serial number, and the pots are dated to the 16th week of 1957. They didn't introduce this model until 1958, so it's very, very early. I've owned six 1958s and they all had 1958 pots.

"I recently bought a '59, which has just landed here at Well Strung Guitars. It's a white one that is pretty beat up, but it's cool – great vibe. This '57, however, is super clean. She took incredible care of it. I laughed because when I got it there were four polishing cloths in the case. It's one of those guitars that plays really well and has been played a lot. But it's also been well taken care of. Plus, it's never been tampered with in any way. It didn't take much to set this up and get it playing. The playability is unbelievable. Both necks play incredibly well. It's wonderful to see." **[RB]**

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001 (516) 221-0563

Introduced in 1958, the Double 12 changed from hollow to solid in the early 60s

PHOTOS BY PAIGE DAVIDSON

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks

Leslie West

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs SSC, Wampler Pinnacle Deluxe, Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 10 mins per example

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE what it must have been like hearing Leslie West tear into his set with Mountain at Woodstock in 1969. The most enduring image today is West playing his Les Paul Junior with a driven tone and sustain – which still sounds great, even at a time when such sounds have become easier to achieve and are relatively mainstream. *Rolling Stone*'s suggestion back then that Mountain were a "louder version of Cream" wasn't entirely without merit, but Mountain definitely brought their own take on blues and rock to the mix – and played through stacks of Sunn amplifiers modified for higher gain, which was pioneering thinking in itself!

Of course, Leslie West played several different guitars through a number of different rigs throughout his career, but he always managed to hit a sweet spot with his volume, drive and sustain. He favoured both major and minor pentatonic ideas in his solos, which would contrast with his frequently minor pentatonic riffs or powerchord sequences, which didn't automatically suggest a major soloing approach. I've said this before, but it's worth repeating: blues and blues-rock gets so much of its character through the deliberate contrasting of major and minor ideas, whether that's BB King pulling a minor 3rd slightly sharp, or Fats Domino trilling between a major and minor 3rd on the piano to give the illusion of a note somewhere in between.

I can't pretend I've second-guessed exactly what Leslie West would have played over this backing, but it's certainly been fun to check out a few of his performances over the years and take an educated guess. As you'll see, the solo was originally played as one continuous take, but we've broken it up into four sections to make it easier to digest. I hope you enjoy it and see you next time. G

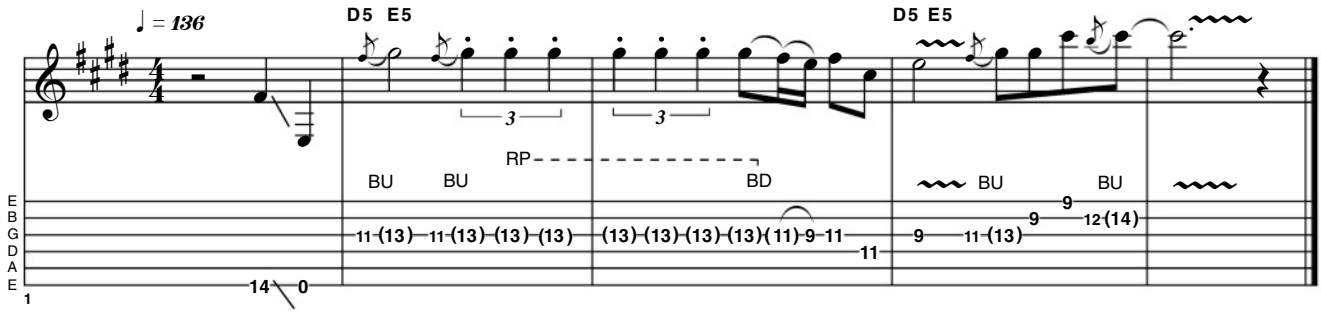
Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from ***www.richardbarrettguitar.com***

Leslie West employed both major and minor pentatonic licks

PHOTO BY DON PAULSEN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

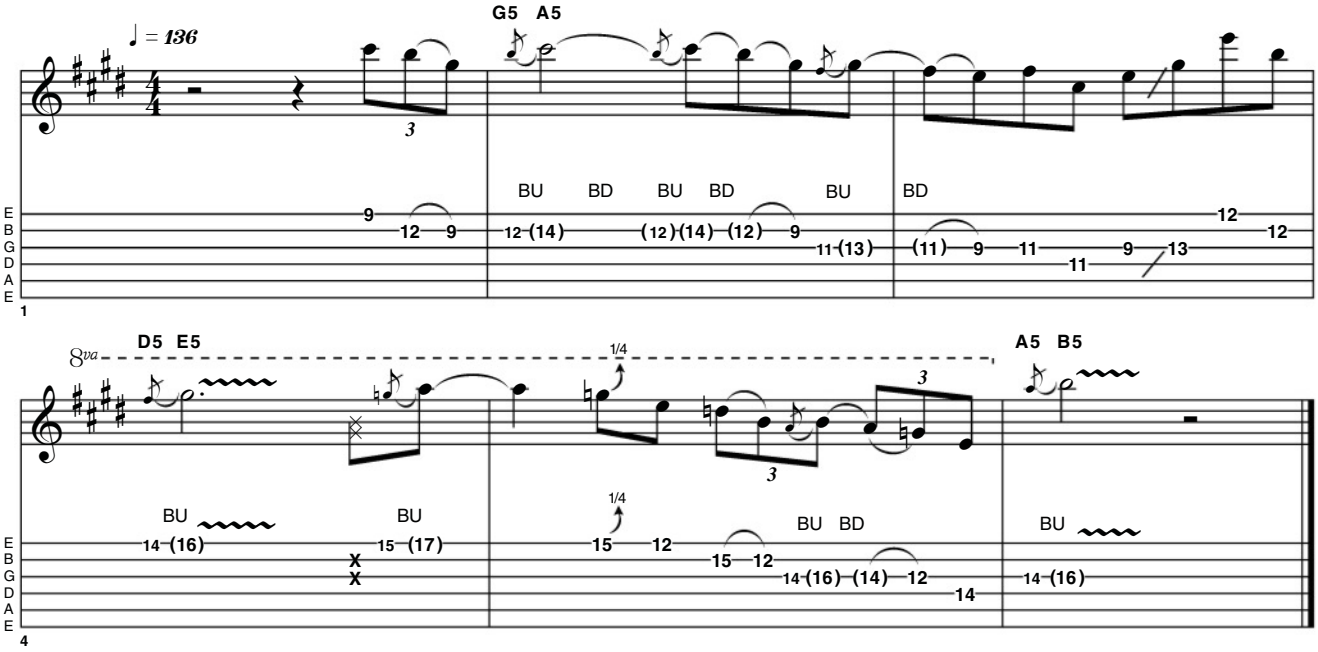
Example 1

THIS OPENING PHRASE heads straight for the major 3rd (G# in this key of E). There's a stuttering rhythm here before heading to a more conventional pentatonic phrase. You could regard this as a shape 5 E major pentatonic or a shape 1 C# minor pentatonic, as they're exactly the same thing, albeit with a different root note. As you may know, every major key has a relative minor, which can be very useful when you want solos to sound 'bluesy' in a major key.



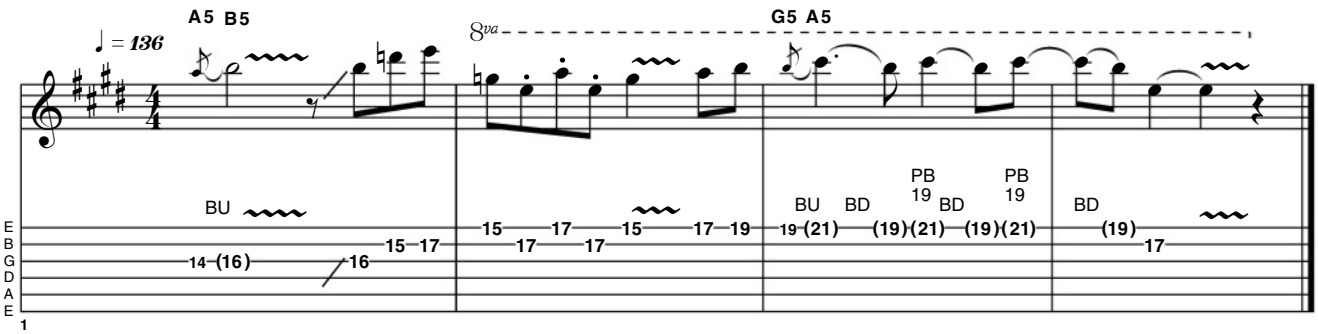
Example 2

AS WE CONTINUE, we're still using the E major/C# minor pentatonic in the 9th position**,** shortly moving up to the 12th fret for what I like to think of as a shape 1 E minor pentatonic, but acknowledging the major 3rd (G#) by bending all or part of the way to it, as well as playing it outright. This is where all the action is when looking to create that major/minor ambiguity that so characterises the blues.



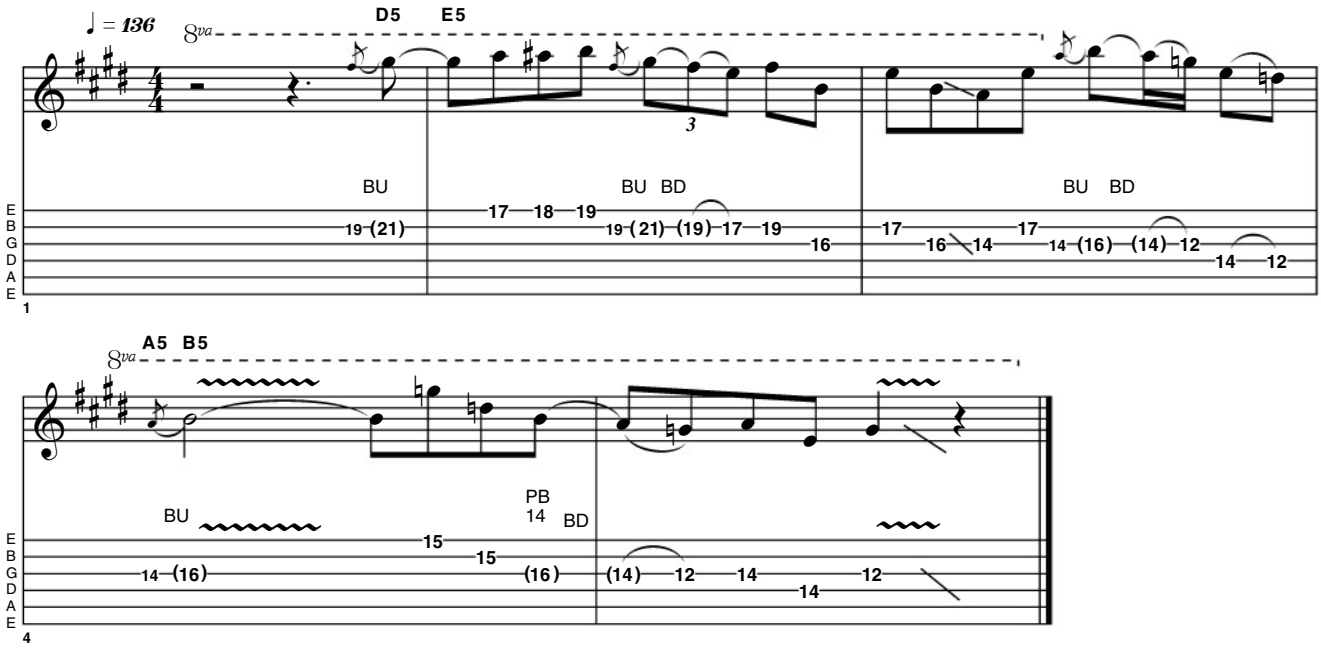
Example 3

ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, THERE IS ANOTHER SHIFT UPWARDS, still staying pentatonic. We start with a fairly clear demonstration of a shape 2 in E minor on the highest three strings, then slide up for what is basically a shape 3 of that same scale but bending up to a C# at the 19th fret of the high E. This nails the major 3rd of the A chord underneath – a powerchord with no 3rd but now perceived as major!



Example 4

STAYING IN THE SAME POSITION over the change back to E and incorporating a number of bends into the major 3rd (G#), I still prefer to view this as E minor pentatonic with some bends to G#. However, you could also correctly view this as a shape 3 E major pentatonic. Either way, we soon shift/slide down to a clear case of shape 1 E minor pentatonic. Go with whichever way works best for you in the moment.



Hear It Here

MOUNTAIN
CLIMBING!

Opening track, *Mississippi Queen*, offers plenty of inspiration for our demo solo and backing track. There's a mix of major and minor pentatonic licks over muscular powerchords and minor pentatonic riffs. *Theme From An Imaginary Western* also shows full mastery of the major pentatonic (and we'd urge you to check out some live versions for West's greater use of dynamics). Finally, have a listen to *Sittin' On A Rainbow* – it's largely major pentatonic but not without a few nods to the minor 3rd.

MOUNTAIN
NANTUCKET SLEIGHRIDE

Released in 1971, this proved a worthy sequel to *Climbing!* with tracks such as *Don't Look Around*, *Nantucket Sleighride (To Owen Coffin)* (used for years as the theme to the UK political show *Weekend World*) and *Tired Angels*, dedicated to the then-recently passed Jimi Hendrix. You can hear that the production has become a little more polished, and that the band has invested in a few of the latest pieces of equipment available, but the raw talent and power behind it all is the same.

MOUNTAIN
FLOWERS OF EVIL

Released later in 1971, this is half new studio material, with the B-side (back in the vinyl days!) taken from a live performance earlier that year. The title track delivers tough-sounding melodic blues-rock, but pretty soon we're into the folk-style melody of *One Last Cold Kiss* and the studio experimentation of *Pride And Passion*. It's also interesting to hear the live approach to *Mississippi Queen*. Finally, check out *Dream Sequence* for a great snapshot of West's guitar prowess at this time.

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